BICYCLING AUSTRALIA

PEAK ROAD PERFORMANCE

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SPECIAL

Tour de France

Men's and Women's races + Aussie Intel

- Tan Man race preview
- Jayco behind the scenes
- Ben O'Connor gearing up

Tested

Hosking bike, Wilier, Wahoo TRACKR, Vittoria tyres, Trek shoes + more

Aussie bikes

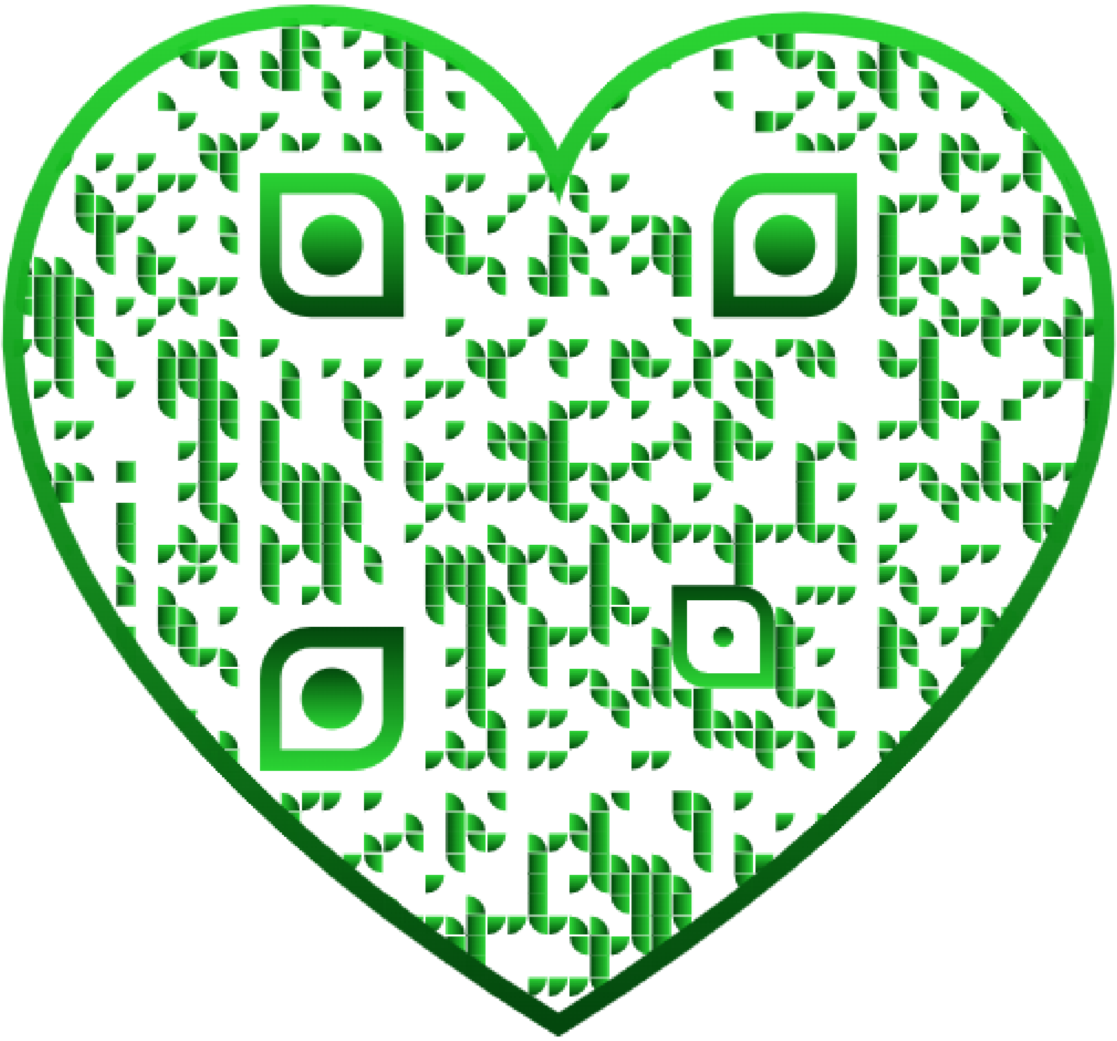
The frame builders keeping the industry going

Women's cycling

Female road riding growing for amateurs and pros

Bike travel

Lee Turner ponders whether to travel with your bike



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The Cold War

"Winter is not a season, it's an occupation." **Sinclair Lewis**

Ah, winter, we meet again. The cold. The dark. The dreary. Chapeau, as always, for testing our mid-year mettle. But try as you might, you shall not prevail. Your gloom and misery is temporary; our love for cycling burns eternal.

Frozen extremities and perpetual sniffles? Be damned. Aching titanium plates? Pfft. Frigid heart rate straps at 5am? A minor inconvenience. Tour de France sleep deprivation? That's why coffee was invented.

We all have our methods for navigating winter. The truly fortunate simply grab their passports and head to Europe. For those left behind, insulated pain caves and smart trainers offer indoor respite. More hardened rouleurs refuse to be shackled by the elements, drawing inspiration from the mantra, "no such thing as bad weather, just bad gear choices." Others modify schedules to venture out during the warmth of the day, taking full advantage of 'working from home' (nudge nudge, wink wink). Then there are those who simply choose to hibernate, resting legs and lungs until the merciful arrival of spring. To each their own.

Of course, whether you ride or not, it remains a paradoxical time as a pro cycling fan. Watching the world's best riders in the world's biggest races bathed in Northern Hemisphere sunshine as we shiver in front of heaters wearing flannelette, not Lycra, can be challenging (as can enduring the same Skoda ads, over and over and over). But nothing warms the heart and hardens the resolve like solitary nights on the sofa with icy toes and bleary eyes – all sustained by little more than the anticipation of a thrilling finale, a successful breakaway or, on the most special of evenings, an Aussie victory.

Keep stoking the fire, dear readers. The flickering flames of motivation have plenty of life in them yet. Besides, it will be spring and La Vuelta before we know it.

Our Contributors

Peter Maniaty
Peter is BA's senior journalist, and highly respected in the world of cycling. From bike reviews to nitty gritty opinion pieces, he's a gun writer.

Anthony Tan
One of our longest-serving columnists, 'Tan Man' has a deep passion for the sport and is a natural communicator.

Alison McGregor
With over a decade of experience working with Italy's revered bike companies, Ali is the co-founder of bike shop Chainsmith.

Amy McPherson
A London-based Aussie, Amy is a keen cyclist and runner. A highly-respected travel writer, she specialises in active travel in France and Italy.

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Steve is a veteran cycling journalist and photographer. He contributes to many publications worldwide, including Bicycling Australia, for over 30 years!

Luke Meers
Wollongong-based writer Luke is a strong and competitive bike rider. He writes regular tech and gear reviews for Bicycling Australia and isn't afraid to get his hands dirty.

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ON THE COVER: Jonas Vingegaard and Tadej Pogačar go head-to-head during the 2024 Tour de France with Matteo Jorgenson. A.S.O. Charly Lopez

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ST SORLIN D'ARVES
MAURIENNE
ST COLOMBAN DES VILLARDS 13
Col du Glandon 25

The Tour de France from another perspective

It's hard not to get excited about the Tour de France, and I've been lucky enough to experience it from a different perspective than most - up close and personal.

My partner and I are Tour de France tragics and have enjoyed its bounty from the side of the road three times over. Each time we hired a campervan, and 'camped' beside the road to watch the riders and the hoopla that accompanies it, whizz by.

Many riders choose to go on an organised tour where they are taken to the vantage points and ride some of the iconic routes, and that's great, but our preference is to forge our own path.

When you choose the freewheel option, there are several challenges to overcome. A typical day for us included:

- Sleeping in
- Kitting up and riding part of the course on our road bikes
- Stopping at the local boulangerie for a fresh baguette
- Returning to our campervan, parked strategically by the road
- Watching the publicity caravan pass and collecting freebies
- Chatting to other tourists
- Watching the riders and their entourage pass by
- Packing up and heading off to the next stage.

The speed at which this all happens depends on the terrain, the weather and our energy levels for the day. It also takes some nimble navigating and driving to find that next 'amazing' location.

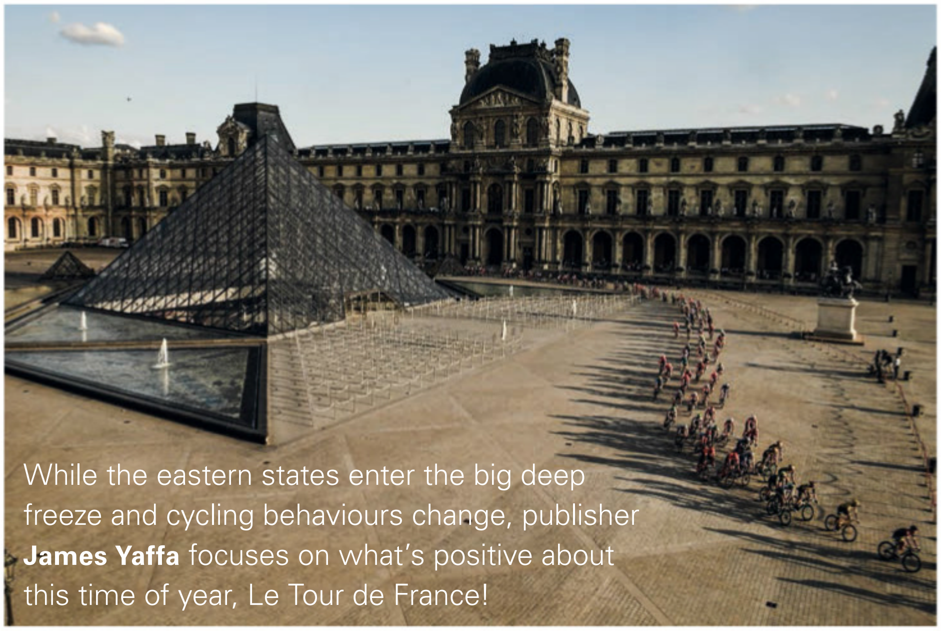
Whichever way you choose to view it, the Tour de France is a must-see event for cycling fans, and that's why we've included a detailed preview in this issue from Anthony Tan, and a French travel feature from Amy McPherson.

You'll also find an insightful piece about the rise of women's cycling from our new contributor, Sam Coombs. Plus, an interesting story about Australian frame builders from Alison McGregor.

Plus, our usual reviews of bikes and gear, which include a Hosking road bike, gravel bikes from Wilier and Polygon. Gear reviews of the new Wahoo TRACKR, Vittoria tyres, Trek shoes, and more.

Nicola Rutzou, Editor

Vive le Tour



While the eastern states enter the big deep freeze and cycling behaviours change, publisher **James Yaffa** focuses on what's positive about this time of year, Le Tour de France!

The idea of watching countless hours of France's greatest scenery and all the amazing history is more than exciting. It's enthralling! And yes, I'm excited about the world's best cyclists going hammer and tongs for 21 stages.

The Tour de France is far more than just a cycling race; it is a spectacle of human endurance, national pride, and cultural celebration. This iconic event traverses France's breathtaking landscapes, offering a unique blend of athleticism and the allure of the country's diverse geography. Beyond the gruelling climbs of the Alps and Pyrenees, the Tour weaves through historic towns, showcasing the rich tapestry of French history and culture.

For cyclists, the Tour represents the ultimate test of stamina, strategy, and teamwork. Riders endure daily stages, often lasting several hours, each designed to challenge different aspects of their fitness and tactics. The mental and physical demands make it a celebration of perseverance and the limits of human potential.

It draws so many non-cyclists to the stage, reinforcing the true significance of this global event, which is widely talked about across all media platforms 24/7.

But the Tour also unites millions of fans across the world. It is an international spectacle where countries and cultures come together, cheering on their heroes and sharing the joy and heartbreak of each twist and turn. The race's colourful jerseys – the yellow jersey for the leader, the polka dot jersey for the climber, and the green jersey for the sprinter – symbolise cycling prowess and the community the Tour brings together.

As a publisher and event director, I also look on in envy at the magnificent scale of the event. Sponsors line up to be a part of it, promoting their wares to the spectators along the roadside, as well as the huge TV and online audiences.

In essence, the Tour de France transcends sport. It's a celebration of the human spirit, a tribute to French heritage, and a platform for global unity, making it a cultural phenomenon that inspires millions every year.

It's time to celebrate cycling!

See you on the bike!

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The Latest Gear

Cycling is constantly evolving and here we look at some of the latest gear spotted by **Nicola Rutzou**.

Ultimate bling with highly reflective Trek Chroma series

For the ultimate in bike bling, Trek has added new colours to its Project One reflective Chroma series.

Chroma is now available in eight all-new colourways: Mirror, Gold, Ivy, Pink, Root Beer, Ruby, Sapphire and Violet.

Chroma is a metallic paint with a highly reflective finish. Trek says it is made with a proprietary method that took its people nearly five years of trial and error to perfect.

The challenge was to create a chrome finish that would adhere to carbon fibre and use a much cleaner method than chrome bikes of the past, which often required toxic chromium materials. Every Chroma bike takes more than 12 hours to paint from start to finish.

Chroma is only available through Project One on Madone SLR models.

More info trekbikes.com

Profile Design one-piece aerobars

Profile Design has launched a new one-piece extension design in its new ASC Pro aerobars. Designed to maximise power output, the ASC Pro 43 Aerobar Extensions are available in three lengths – 325mm, 350mm, and 375mm – to suit different riders' needs.

In designing the new aerobars, Profile Design focused on comfort, aerodynamics, and a custom-like fit. They provide a consistent surface from elbow to wrist, ensuring optimal rider position.

Constructed from one-piece carbon, the ASC Pro offers unmatched comfort and precision with its arm-hugging design, from the 43° grips to the high-sided Race+ shaped arm cups. Riser kits and tilt wedges are available for a tailored fit, along with the ASC computer mount.

More info profiledesign-au.com

Zipp built-in tyre pressure sensor

Zipp has unveiled its new 353 NSW and 303 SW wheelsets, with integrated live tyre pressure sensor technology. The new models are the first AXS-connected wheelsets, bringing them into SRAM's electronic systems with in-wheel tyre pressure monitoring integrated into the rim.

The AXS wheel sensor includes a light that flashes green when the tyre is set to the correct pressure range and red when it falls outside it. It is more sophisticated below the surface, integrating with SRAM's wider ecosystem, including SRAM's AXS app, providing metrics and user guidance on the tyre pressure system.

The new system can also be integrated with Garmin, Wahoo and Hammerhead head units to provide real-time tyre pressure monitoring on the screen.

Alongside the new tyre pressure technology, Zipp had introduced a TPU tube that is fully compatible with the system. If a puncture isn't repairable with sealant or a plug, the TPU tube can be inserted with the functionality preserved. Riders can also set the system up using the TPU tubes if they prefer that setup.

More info sram.com/en/zipp

Adventure guidebook for proposed Vic National Park

A new adventure guidebook takes readers inside the Victorian National Park that isn't actually on the map yet: Great Forest National Park.
The guidebook shares the destinations, activities, science and history behind the proposed Great Forest National Park in Victoria's Central Highlands.

For over a decade, locals and researchers have mapped out a plan to declare the Great Forest National Park. As political uncertainty leaves the forest's future at risk, locals have produced a Great Forest Park Guidebook to showcase opportunities for engaging with the park area while protecting it for future generations.

The guidebook includes hundreds of pages to inspire cyclists, walkers, campers, fishers, runners, horse riders, 4-wheel drivers and more.

More info
greatforestnationalpark.com.au

GREAT FOREST PARK GUIDE
GET TO KNOW YOUR GREAT FOREST

Santini packable rainproof jacket

Santini's new 'Magic' rainproof jacket is ideal for cyclists who brave the harshest rain conditions. It is lightweight and can be stored in its own rear pocket, making it an essential tool for sudden downpours. Crafted from advanced Polartec fabric, it offers superior waterproofing and is environmentally friendly, utilising high-elasticity recycled polyester in its outer layer and internal membrane.

With a retail price of $350, it is completely thermo-sealed and features a double-opening front zip, a slim fit, an extended back for enhanced rain and dirt protection and a high collar to block water infiltration. The reflective Santini logo on the back ensures riders remain visible during low-light conditions.

More info
santinisms.com.au

Campagnolo Super Record 13 groupset

Campagnolo has launched the new Super Record 13, the first road groupset equipped with a 2x13 derailleur.

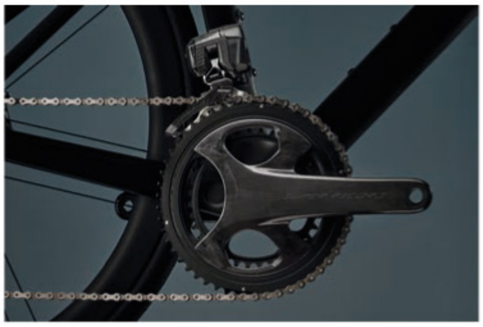
According to Campagnolo, it is much more than adding an extra sprocket; the Super Record 13 represents the top configuration of the new development platform, the result of a completely revisited production process aimed at containing costs. This is due to significant investments in component automation and optimisation, which Campagnolo describes as a deliberate corporate choice to reposition the company's product range.

Campagnolo says that the new Super Record 13 provides accurate, silent and immediate shifting, even at high power levels, and completely renewed ergonomics for the controls.

In developing the new groupset, Campagnolo has reduced the distance between the sprockets and decreased their thickness to house the 'extra gear'. The new front chainrings feature a new surface treatment that preserves their durability over time and a new tooth shape designed to facilitate faster chain engagement during gear changes.

The new 13 speed groupset has an RRP of $6,999, and $8,999 with a power meter.

More info campagnolo.com/au-en



Muc-Off mini inflator pocket-sized pump

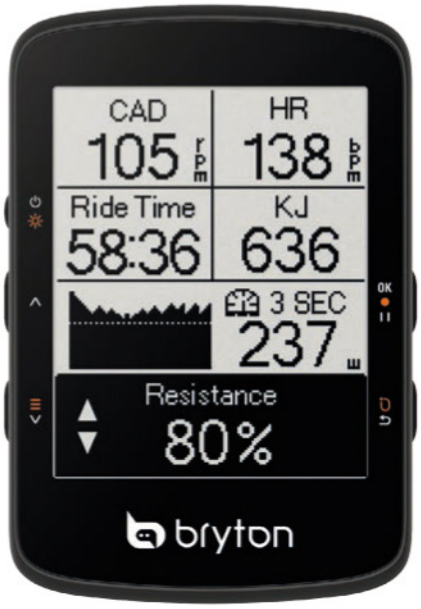
Muc-Off has launched a new mini inflator pocket-sized pump. The new AirMach Electric Mini Inflator Pro builds on the success of the original AirMach Electric Mini and delivers rapid inflation up to 120psi. It weighs just 122g (142g with case) and measures 64.5x63x28mm, so it can be stowed in a jersey pocket or bike bag.

One of the most significant upgrades over the first-generation model is the LED display, which provides a real-time air pressure and battery level readout. With a 450mAh lithium-ion battery, the Pro version can inflate up to four road bike tyres on a single charge, and recharges in 30 minutes via USB-C.

The new model includes an AirHose extender, which enables compatibility with plastic valves and TPU inner tubes and makes it easier to inflate smaller wheels such as those found on children's bikes. The inflator also includes an inflatable toy nozzle and a ball inflation needle.

Available for a retail price of $190.

More info muc-off.com



Bryton Rider 460

The new Bryton Rider 460 boasts a large 2.6-inch black and white screen, ensuring crystal-clear visibility in all conditions.

One of the Rider 460's standout features is its new and improved Graphic User Interface (GUI), which offers intuitive navigation and easy access to a wealth of cycling data.

With an impressive 32-hour battery life, the Rider 460 supports popular electronic gear-shifting systems, including Shimano Di2, SRAM eTap, FSA K-FORCE WE, and Campagnolo EPS. After simple pairing, it also supports ANT+ radar rear lights.

Other features, such as Intersection Snapshot, take navigation to the next level, providing clear visual displays of nearby roads at intersections, ensuring you stay on course. Meanwhile, the Climb Challenge feature provides riders with graphical insights to help them conquer uphill terrain.

Available for an RRP of $220.

More info bikechain.com.au

New Factor Monza

The new Factor Monza is a road bike optimised for racers seeking a balance between high performance and everyday practicality. Taking its name from one of the world's most iconic racing circuits, the Monza is built on the engineering of the Factor Ostro Vam. Factor describes the Monza as a true high-performance race bike that balances speed, efficiency, and real-world usability while retaining Factor's racing DNA.

The new model retains an aero-optimised frame, tuned for efficiency in real-world racing conditions, while refining certain features and materials to reduce manufacturing complexity and costs.

The Monza's head tube and fork feature converging contours, while the top tube, seat stays, and chain stays have smaller-profiled tube sections with tighter, more refined lines, enhancing both aerodynamics and manufacturing efficiency.

Integrated in-frame storage features a convenient latch mechanism for easy access to ride essentials, without compromising aerodynamics.

The Monza is available in three colours at launch – Solar blue, Steel Green and Pearl White.

More info au.factorbikes.com

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Riders climb the Col du Tourmalet on Stage 14 of the 2024 Tour de France. Photo credit: A.S.O. Charly Lopez

“Great things are done when men and mountains meet.”

WILLIAM BLAKE, ENGLISH POET

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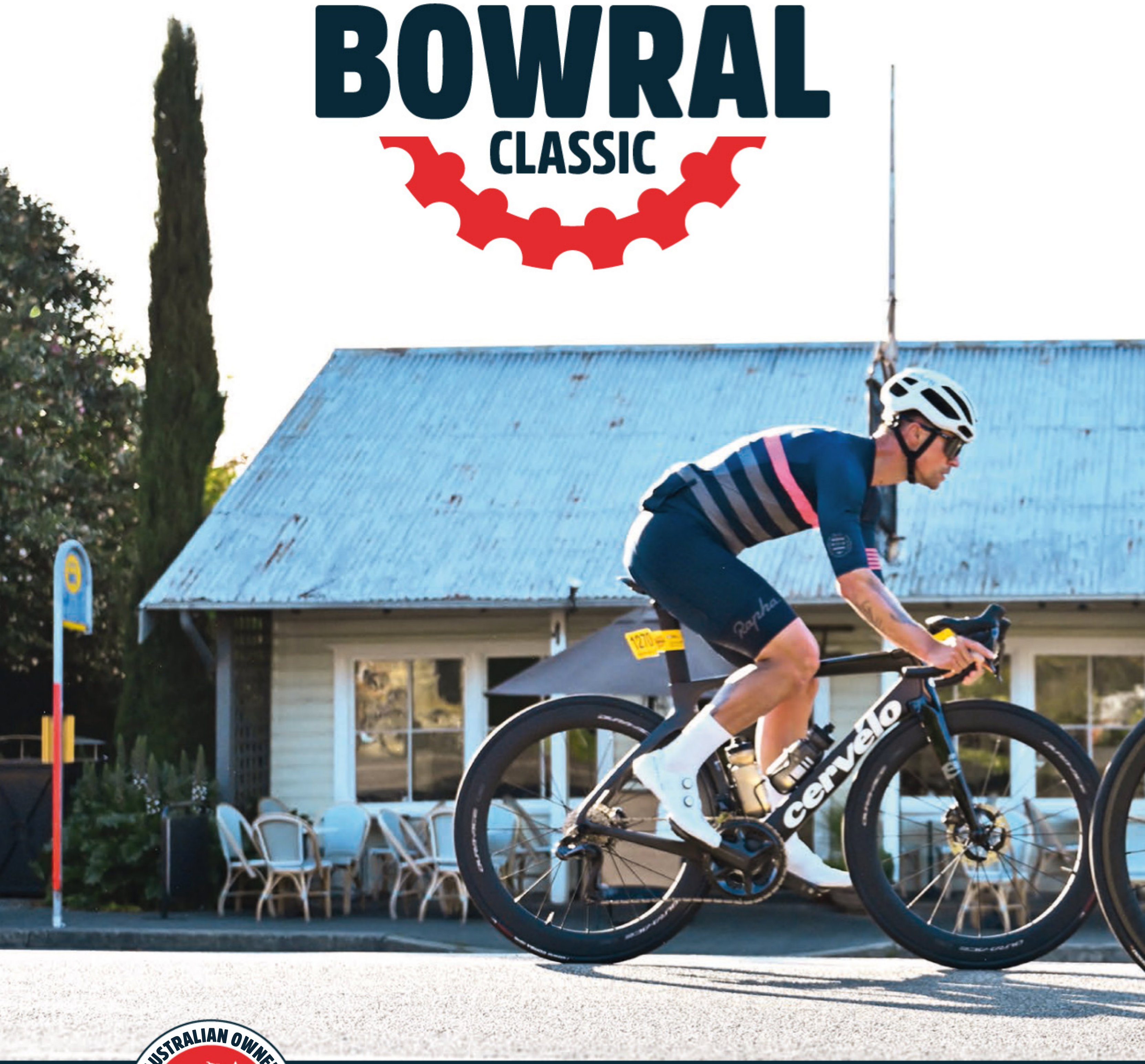

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The peloton passes the Arc de Triomphe in the 2022 Tour de France.

Tour de France Preview: Old School

Anthony Tan tells us what you need to know before the 112th edition of *Le Tour* gets going on July 5.

WORDS: ANTHONY TAN

ABOVE: The peloton making its way from Mâcon to Dijon on Stage 6 of the 2024 Tour de France.

ABOVE RIGHT: Stage 18 of the 2024 Tour de France.

Photo credits: A.S.O. Charly Lopez

Is this a traditional Tour de France?

Well, yes, in the sense that this year's edition will be held entirely *en France*.

It's also a bit of a throwback to when current Tour director Christian Prudhomme's predecessor, Jean-Marie Leblanc, was in charge of *La Grande Boucle*, from 1989 to 2007.

Leblanc, a former professional cyclist (1966-71) and then journalist at *L'Équipe*, whose owners also run the Tour, didn't like anything too mountainous in the opening week.

A number of the Tours he presided over began with an individual time trial under 10 kilometres, followed by a handful of stages for the sprinters, and sometimes a team time trial in between. When the mountains came, though, midway through the second and throughout the third week, they came in abundance, often with three or four such stages back-to-back.

In fact, the first Tour he was general director is still considered one of the best. Heading into the 24.5km final stage ITT in Paris, American Greg LeMond overturned a 50-second deficit to Laurent Fignon to triumph over the Frenchman by eight seconds – still the smallest winning margin in men's history. There is much more to these characters and this edition than space here will allow, but suffice to say it was a humdinger.

Like those which Leblanc presided over, this year's Tour favours the fast men in the first nine days. Four out of the seven probable sprint finishes come in this initial salvo, beginning with the opener around Lille in the north, a stone's throw to the Belgian border. This hasn't been done since 2020, when the Promenade des Anglais became the Pile-up des Anglais and big Norwegian Alexander Kristoff was the beneficiary and first to don yellow.

In 2025 there will be an ITT but not till Stage 5: "Most of the course will be on wide, completely flat roads that demand a great deal of power. The strongest rouleurs should be right in their element," remarks Prudhomme in his Tour notes.

The first mountain leg arrives on none other than Bastille Day, July 14, but if we're talking rarefied air you'll have to wait another three days till Stage 12, when the peloton enters the Pyrenees and tackles the beast that is Hautacam.

A mountain time trial to Peyragudes follows the very next day, followed by another mountain stage, creating three distinct opportunities for a reordering of the classement général. Yet, Stage 14 to Luchon-Superbagnères is only the second of five summit finishes in this year's route, which reaffirms the notion that the third week is invariably the hardest.

Unlike the '89 Tour there will be no time trial to end proceedings – Prudhomme tried that last year in Nice due to the Olympics.

The Pog was more than five minutes in front of his closest rival, Jonas Vingegaard, and the Dane was almost three minutes ahead of Remco Evenepoel, making for a rather lacklustre finale. So, once again, the Avenue des Champs-Élysées will be the setting for the de facto sprinters' world championship.

In short, 99 times out of 100, the strongest man wins, but he must first make it to Paris.

Must-see Stages

STAGE 2: LAUWIN-PLANQUE - BOULOGNE-SUR-MER, 212KM

If the opening stage was for the sprinters, the next will be for the puncheurs et baroudeurs (Flemish Ardennes-style riders and breakaway specialists) and will almost certainly result in a change of leadership.

None of the four categorised climbs top out at more than 200m altitude and the longest is 1.1km – yet the terrain is such that, by day's end, the peloton will have climbed more than 2,100m. Three of the *côtés* (small hills) come in the final 30km and the final kilometre, while uncategorised, rises 5% to the line.

A fresh peloton, and the stage and *maillot jaune* up for grabs… Game on, *Allez!*

TOP: Michael Matthews and Jai Hindley during Stage 18 of the Tour de France. Photo credit: A.S.O. Billy Ceusters

ABOVE: Jasper Stuyven on Stage 1 of the 2024 Tour de France. Photo credit: A.S.O. Charly Lopez

STAGE 10: ENNEZAT - LE MONT-DORE PUY DE SANCY, 163KM

Other than the Stage 5 individual time trial, this is the most significant test so far for those vying for a high place in Paris.

There are seven categorised climbs but to be frank, such is the saw-toothed profile of the tenth stage, organisers could easily have called it ten. It's up and down from the get-go and respite will come only at the resort finish in Mont-Dore: "The 3.5km (Puy de Sancy) climb averaging 8% will bring the total vertical gain for the day to 4,400 metres!" exclaims Tour director Christian Prudhomme.

One can easily picture his toothy grin as he sits in the back of his air-conditioned red Škoda Superb...

STAGE 12: AUCH - HAUTACAM, 181KM

If a Pyrenean mountain has a derivation of the word *haute* (meaning high) in its name, it must be there for a reason.

The three climbs of the Col du Soulor (11.9 kilometres at 7.3%), the Col des Bordères (3.1 kilometres at 7.6%) and Hautacam (13.6 kilometres at 7.8%) come within the last 60km. Relatively speaking, though, it's not quite as tough as Stage 18 of the 2022 Tour, the last time the race visited this ski resort in the Hautes-Pyrénées, when the Col d'Aubisque and Col de Spandelles preceded Hautacam.

But back then, the race had effectively been decided. Vingegaard was 2'18 ahead of The Pog and, since taking yellow on Stage 11, not for a moment looked like getting dropped. Such was the strength of the Dane's team, in fact, that it was consummate all-rounder Wout van Aert who, by virtue of his pace-setting, dropped Pogačar on Hautacam, resulting in Jonas gaining a minute more on his nemesis.

It's a forgone conclusion that Tadej will look to rewrite that script on July 17.

STAGE 16: MONTPELLIER - MONT VENTOUX, 172KM

To date, the peloton has tackled two weeks of racing that included three mountain stages and two individual time trials, including an 11km ITT to Peyragudes, as well as two rest days.

That this next mountain leg comes off the back of the second rest day in Montpellier in effect creates a double whammy. All riders react differently after a jour de repos, and secondly, it is unique in that out of the six mountain stages it is the only one with just one major climb.

Mont Ventoux, also known as *Le Géant de Provence* (The Beast of Provence), is divided into two parts: the first 10km through the forest to Chalet Reynard, and the final 5.7km to the observatory that overlooks the finish line.

Where to attack, then? Well, depending on your legs, "at absolutely every point", suggests Prudhomme. Helpful, isn't he?

STAGE 18: VIF - COURCHEVEL COL DE LA LOZE, 171KM

For the GC riders it's the penultimate test, but if the Tour hasn't yet been decided it will by day's end.

Boasting more than 5,500 metres' climbing and traversing three massive mountains it's either up, up, up or down, down, down.

At this point, cumulative fatigue suggests a long-range attack by any of the protagonists for the Paris podium is unlikely; the seemingly interminable 26.2km final climb of the Col de la Loze makes it more so. It has been used as recently as the 2020 and 2023 editions of Le Tour (albeit from a different side), and between the top dogs, time gaps were significant.

Also, don't be fooled by its modest average gradient of 6.5%. It is a highly irregular ascent with three sections over 10% and two come in the last five kilometres.

By the way, next time your local council member tells you it's too hard to build bike paths, tell 'em they're lyin': they've built a cycle track for the last four Ks on this 2,304m climb!

Podium Pick

Let's be honest: If all are fit and healthy, it's hard to look past last year's podium. What order they'll finish is a little harder. I'll say Pogačar, Evenepoel, Vingegaard.

Aussie Watch

If he's there, and mishaps aside there's no reason for him not to, Ben O'Connor will be gunning for the podium.

As early as March there was only one event confirmed on his race schedule: *Le Tour*, of course!

It highlights the significance of the race for O'Connor and his team Jayco AlUla. Sure, they have other objectives with sprinter Dylan Groenewegen, who nabbed a stage last year in Dijon, but the primary focus is to get Big Ben to finish as high on GC as his 1.88 metre frame will allow.

With a breakthrough 2024 season, the 29-year-old from Subiaco, Perth, has proven his fourth place at the 2021 Tour was no fluke, finishing fourth and second overall at the Giro d'Italia and Vuelta a España, respectively. Over the next few years, the only thing left to discover is how high he can fly at the Tour.

Undoubtedly, he'll be well supported – arguably better than he was in his four years at Decathlon AG2R La Mondiale. Irish climber Eddie Dunbar will be his right hand man in the mountains.

In light of who he's up against, a podium in Paris would be as good as a win – but he'll need Lady Luck and the form of his life to make it. BA

2025 Tour de France

DAY	DATE	LOCATION	KM	TERRAIN
1	5 July	Lille Métropole - Lille Métropole	185km	Flat
2	6 July	Lauwin-Planque - Boulogne-sur-Mer	212km	Hilly
3	7 July	Valenciennes - Dunkerque	178km	Flat
4	8 July	Amiens Métropole - Rouen	173km	Hilly
5	9 July	Caen - Caen	33km	Time Trial
6	10 July	Bayeux - Vire Normandie	201km	Hilly
7	11 July	Saint-Malo - Mûr-de-Bretagne Guerlédan	194km	Hilly
8	12 July	Saint-Méen-le-Grand - Laval Espace Mayenne	174km	Flat
9	13 July	Chinon - Châteauroux	170km	Flat
10	14 July	Ennezat - Le Mont-Dore Puy de Sancy	163km	Mountain
	15 July	Rest Day		
11	16 July	Toulouse - Toulouse	154km	Flat
12	17 July	Auch - Hautacam	181km	Mountain
13	18 July	Loudenvielle - Peyragudes	11km	Time trial
14	19 July	Pau - Luchon-Superbagnères	183km	Mountain
15	20 July	Muret - Carcassonne	169km	Hilly
	21 July	Rest Day		
16	22 July	Montpellier - Mont Ventoux	172km	Mountain
17	23 July	Bollène - Valence	161km	Flat
18	24 July	Vif - Courchevel Col de la Loze	171km	Mountain
19	25 July	Albertville - La Plagne	130km	Mountain
20	26 July	Nantua - Pontarlier	185km	Hilly
21	27 July	Mantes-la-Ville - Paris Champs-Élysées	120km	Flat

2025 Tour de France Femmes: A Dish Served Cold…

This year's race will be longer, harder, and, boasting 17,240 metres of elevation gain, ultimately higher, writes Anthony Tan.

It's taken just three editions to prove that women's racing can be as exciting – often times more so – than the men's.

Atop Alpe d'Huez and after 949.7 kilometres, last year's TdF Femmes saw Poland's Katarzyna (Kasia) Niewiadoma prevail over defending champion Demi Vollering of the Netherlands by a margin of four seconds – the smallest winning margin in Tour history, women or men.

That the first three placegetters, all from different teams, finished within 10 seconds of each other, and the top 10 within eight minutes – contrast that to the men's event, where, over 3,498km, 9'18 separated the podium and almost half an hour the first ten riders – demonstrates a depth of field very much on par with the men.

La course est difficile…

One more than the year previous for a total of nine stages over 1,165 kilometres, but unlike yesteryear, no double-stage days or an individual time trial.

As with the men's TdF, there'll be the same number of teams (comprising 15 UCI Women's WorldTeams and seven Continental Teams) and same classifications – being yellow, green, polka dot and white for best young rider.

The Grand Départ for this year is in the cycling heartland of Brittany, and kicks off Saturday July 26 with a short though plenty punchy 79km road stage from Vannes to Plumelec.

Entering the finale, three times up the 1.7km Côte de Cadoudal as part of a 13.9km finishing circuit – repeated twice – will inevitably see a reduced selection scrapping for the first maillot jaune. With a hat-trick of stages designated as "flat" to follow, so long as they and their team have their wits about them, it could be the same rider in yellow till at least the following Wednesday (Stage 5).

Speaking of Hump Day, whether a reordering occurs will depend on the proclivities of those in the peloton. With 1,800m of elevation gain concentrated mostly in the final 40km in the form of three categorised climbs but no ascent longer than 3.3km, it's likely a modest group of baroudeurs will contest line honours.

Those small hills (or côtes) get upsized on Stage 6 over 124km, run entirely in the department of Puy-de-Dôme, the largest being the midway ascent of the Col du Béal (10.2km at 5.6%). With two shorter climbs to follow and "running through a wild landscape of volcanic rock, there will be no respite at all on the road to Ambert", forewarns race director Marion Rousse.

The seventh stage is designated as "hilly" and it is – but only for the final 50 clicks. The Col du Granier (8.9km at 5.4%), its summit located 17.7km from the finish, combined with the fast and technical descent into Chambéry, will prove decisive.

The queen stage, however, is indisputably on Saturday.

The 112km ninth, and penultimate, leg is either up or down, boasting 3,600m of elevation gain. That it finishes atop the tougher southern side of the 18.6km Col de la Madeleine, figuratively described as "beautiful, but heartbreaking", is certainly un plat qui se mange froid (a dish served cold).

A small consolation: the first half of the Madeleine is the hardest.

The overall winner is 95 per cent certain to be discovered here rather than the day following, which Rousse views as "a good opportunity for those behind in the (overall) standings to try to turn things around".

But this is Le Tour, the dastardly Col de Joux-Plane is on le menu du jour, and strange things can happen.

PODIUM PICK

2023 champion Vollering, who switched teams to FDJ-Suez after last season, will surely be seeking to avenge her loss to Niewiadoma (Canyon–SRAM zondacrypto).

After announcing her retirement in 2021, four-time Giro Donne champion Anna van der Breggen is back with Team SD Worx–Protime. And missing last year's race due to illness, there's also the likely presence of 2024 Giro Donne winner Elisa Longo Borghini (UAE Team ADQ).

So let's just say it'll be 28-year-old Demi in a ding-dong against three 30-somethings in Niewiadoma, van der Breggen and Longo Borghini.

AUSSIE WATCH

It's been a slim couple of years for Australian women on the WorldTour calendar, but if there are two that can do well overall it's Niewiadoma's team buddy Neve Bradbury (winner of the queen stage and third GC at last year's Giro Donne) and Sarah Gigante (AG Insurance–Soudal), seventh overall at the 2024 TdF Femmes.

OPPOSITE: Riders on Stage 6 of the 2024 Tour de France Femmes avec Zwift.

ABOVE: Crowds watch the Tour de France Femmes 2024, Stage 7.

LEFT: Kasia Niewiadoma after the final stage of the Tour de France Femmes 2024.

BELOW: Liv-AlUla rider Mavi Garcia in Stage 4 of the 2024 Tour de France Femmes. Photo credits: A.S.O. Charly Lopez

Le Tour de Nord France

The 2025 Tour de France is starting in the city of Lille and spending most of the first few stages in northern France. Amy McPherson tours the area to see what it offers riders.

WORDS: AMY MCPHERSON

Lille, the Grand Depart

My trip covers a big loop, roughly following the first stages of this year's Tour de France, and it made sense to begin from Lille, where I relish the Grand Depart countdown. Lille is close to the border with Belgium and is only an hour by fast train from Paris; it combines French charm with Flemish flair.

I hired a bike from a local man Fabien, who is a keen cyclist. We rolled out from the Grand Place, where the team presentation will open the festivities of the Tour de France. Lille didn't need to wait for the party, for the city is also hosting its regular arts and cultural festival – Fiesta – this year. Splashed around the elegant Flemish facades of the houses are bright and quirky artworks and posters advertising events and exhibitions.

We journey along the network of cycle ways, which northern France is famous for. Cycling is a delight here. The locals seem to have learnt from their cycling-loving Belgian neighbours – the infrastructure and the respect everyone has for others is top class.

"Even the French from elsewhere come to the north and say we are super friendly," said Fabien, when I mentioned how considerate and respectful all the road users have been towards cyclists. "It really is a nice place to bike."

We photographed some of Lille's major sights, from Porte de Paris and the nearby Beffroi de Lille, then popping to Gare Saint Sauveur to check out the free exhibition that is part of the Fiesta festival, before getting back into the old city to browse the markets. Of course, we made a stop at the Tour de France countdown, just because!

It's not my first time here, and as far as cities go, I prefer Lille to Paris. The Flemish heritage heavily influences its architecture and cuisine, including beer making. This is where you'll find France's best beers, guaranteed.

Sightseeing aside, Lille is a fantastic base for a couple of exciting day rides out of the city. Take the cobbles of Paris-Roubaix for example, which starts in Lille and winds its way through surrounding villages chasing cobbles until looping back to Roubaix, north of Lille. More cobbles await across the border in Belgium. There's the Eddy Merckx Route to tackle too.

But I am not here to race on champion roads. I wanted to appreciate northern France on two wheels, take my time to smell the roses if you will, so at the end of my tour, Fabien entrusted me with his bike and waved me off to check out some great cycle touring routes in these parts.

A Grande Boucle through the Flemish north

From Lille to Dunkirk, you can either cross the border and go through Belgium or stay on the French side and visit some of the lesser-visited parts of this country.

Amy cycling past
Porte de Paris.

CALAIS
LA
PLAGE

Tour de France
GRAND DEPART
J- 089
Lille Métropole vous donne rendez-vous
Le 5 juillet 2025
1re étape
Nord
MÉTROPOLE

A very popular cycling route called 'Véloroute des Flandres' joins Armentières, a town on the outskirts of Lille, to the coastal city of Dunkirk. Following mostly quiet roads through some border towns with distinct Flemish names like Godewaersvelde and Wormhout. You'd think you'd crossed the border to a different country!

Spring was in the air, and the route took me through farmland flanked by bright yellow fields of canola flowers and green sprouts of wheat. Although narrow, the road is empty except for a few cars and an occasional tractor.

Although northern France doesn't have the epic climbs, there is pleasure in cycling through a serene landscape, with buzzards and peregrine falcons circling overhead, and occasional ground-dwelling pheasants dashing in and out of the surrounding bushes.

And then, just as my mind began to tune into a steady spin pattern, I heard drumming. It was coming from the local church spire, and I found myself in the middle of giants. The giants of northern France are legendary among its cultural folklore and I've been wanting to see them paraded for a long time. I stayed for a while admiring these giant puppets and the dedication and efforts of the local people toward them each year.

The roads became busier as I approached Dunkirk, and flags began to pave my way

into the city itself. We all know Dunkirk as an important episode in World War II, but what we learned at school in Australia was a small portion of the operation that happened here. As I rode onto the seafront promenade, I was lured to the side of the bridge where I heard a lone, solemn tune played on bagpipes before a moules frites (mussels and fries, specialty of these parts) dinner with a beach sunset.

La Velomaritime, along coast

I woke up to a brilliant blue sky the next day. My destination for the night was a town called Boulogne-sur-Mer, a journey of around 110km along the La Velomaritime route, which is part of the European cycle route, EuroVelo4 (EV4).

Feeling lazy, I cheat by hopping on a train to Calais, reducing the distance by half so I can enjoy the cycling and the coast on this rare sunny day.

One note about regional French trains. I love them. Tickets are cheap, and there are bike racks on every regional train service, sometimes in more than one carriage, carrying up to six bikes. This makes cycle touring in France exceptionally easy.

From Calais, it was one wiggly road that hugs the coast southwards although the official EV4 route dips in and out of the farmlands to avoid the busy parts of the main road. This day had a completely different atmosphere to the Flanders route of yesterday, for it was not flat. The coastline rises and falls like a seismic graph and punchy hills soon drained the energy out of my untrained legs.

There are beaches aplenty, and this stretch of the coast, called the Opal Coast, is famed for its natural beauty. With 120km of beaches, dunes, and cliffs, it was popular with artists who came here to paint its landscape. I rode with the wind in my hair and a song on my lips until a sharp climb made me ponder why I do this to myself!

Although it is beautiful, we must not forget that we have not left the warring past behind. This stretch of coast was on Nazi Germany's Atlantic Wall line of defence, and bunkers can still be seen (and visited) all along the coast. Those interested will find war museums in almost every town, although I avoided those on my trip, both due to lack of time and to save my tears.

The Somme Valley route

By the third day, I have gone west and south, and now turn east to form my loop. I began the day on a train from Boulogne-sur-Mer inland to Abbeville to follow the Somme Valley route.

This is another region we associate with the wars, especially for our Australian Imperial Forces during World War I.

The valley is quiet, and the cycle route is almost entirely amongst nature, on compact gravel along the Somme River. In contrast to the previous days, the route was flat, easy and traffic-free, and well-shaded by trees.

I could switch off my traffic alert system, look out only for squirrels and water rats, and enjoy the ride until I arrived at the final destination of Amiens.

The city's cathedral, the largest in France, has memorial plaques for the Australians who fought here. And that's not the only link. Australian artist Fintan Magee has painted some stunning street art in his bevelled glass style. If you love street art, you will love Amiens, as there is plenty of it.

With three varied routes and a network of others crisscrossing them in a region so friendly to cyclists, what's not to love about cycling in northern France? BA

CLOCKWISE FROM BOTTOM LEFT: Outside the Tour de France countdown.

The Somme Valley route.

Calais sea front.

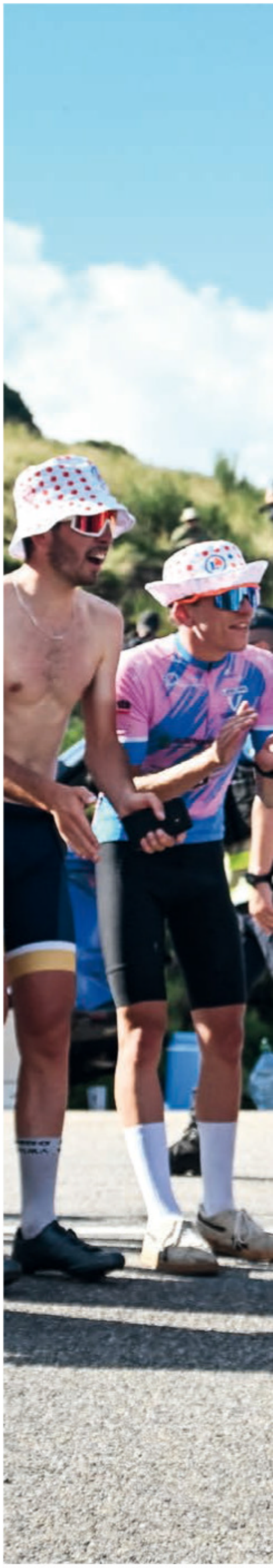
Cycling past the government prefecture offices.

Amy starting her tour of Lille.

What goes on Tour with Jayco AlUla

It's said that the Tour de France is a great two-wheeled travelling circus, and indeed, it's one heck of a cycling roadshow, and so you can but imagine what goes on behind the scenes to keep things running smoothly for the riders and fans.

WORDS: STEVE THOMAS



With the Tour de France about to get underway, we caught up with Jayco AlUla's backstage crew to find out exactly what happens behind our TV screens. We spoke to a race director, mechanic, masseur, nutritionist, logistics person, and media manager about what it takes to keep the team in their best shape for the three-week tour.

Matt White, Director of Performance & Racing*

**Since this interview was conducted, Matt White has left the Jayco AlUla team.*

What are the managerial and team car setup and roles at the Tour?

We have four directors (DSs), plus myself, and the general manager is also there for most of the Tour. Usually, I go in front of the race to pass on live info on the course, wind conditions, etc. We're only allowed two team cars in the convoy, so we have two directors in each car – one on the radio and one driving.

How does the team briefing system work?

Depending on your focus for that tour, there will be some stages that the directors have already checked out, and for others, you're looking at different apps, like Google Maps, to assess the terrain. On a typical morning, the directors will get together, go for a bit of a run or a walk, and chat about things for the day. Then, about 30 minutes before the bus leaves, we'll meet and have a chat with the whole team.

One director will prepare a presentation about the course and the tactics, and then the other directors will fix up the hotel bills, manage the staff, and look after other things, because there are many people there. We have a team of nearly 40 people (inc riders) at the Tour, and there are a lot of vehicles to move, too.

After the stage, we always debrief the riders on the bus on the way back to the hotel. We (DSs) then meet before dinner to make a plan for the next day. Everyone has their own responsibilities to put together for the next day.

If you go into the race with a plan of what you think will happen, you also have to be

Australian rider Luke Durbridge during Stage 15 of the 2024 Tour de France. Photo credit: A.S.O. Billy Ceusters

adaptable, depending on who's leading the race, the situation and how your riders are feeling. Sometimes your goals change early in the race; if you crash early in the Tour and your GC leaders are off GC, you have to change your tack and look for stages. If your sprinter is in good form, or if one is not, then you have to change with that.

What is the in-race communication system, and how does it work?

We've all got televisions, though, thanks to the inconsistency of French phone networks, and where you are, things can be a bit sketchy. When we're in Belgium and Holland, we always have perfect signals, but when you're away from major population centres, you can struggle to get a television signal.

Television is also not live – well, it's live, but not live, as it can be up to a minute behind. You're getting some good information, but a lot of the time, you can't make decisions based on that, as it's already happened. We have race radio, which is ok at the Tour. If we're desperate, we always have someone, or another director that we can trust at home in front of the TV!

We also communicate with the riders, depending on your car order in the convoy, and sometimes that's very clear, other times it's not. We're also relying on road captains; we have guys in every team that can make good decisions before we can, so we've got to have experienced guys in the group that can make those decisions.

Mattia Romano, Head Mechanic

How many bikes go on Tour?

We generally have four road bikes for each rider. Three of them are used in the race (one race bike and two spares), while a fourth is left in the truck in case of emergency, ready to be used in case of falls resulting in irreparable damage.

For TT bikes, riders have two bikes each, one race and one spare, while for the team leader, there is a third. In addition, each rider has one spare frame in the truck.

What spares go on Tour, and what is the process with swapping kit?

We change the tyres most frequently, both for safety reasons and to prevent punctures. As for the mechanical parts, normally for a race like the Tour, we start with new components, which means new gears, chains, pads, and cassette. By following regular maintenance and replacing components on rest days when we have more time, we keep the mechanical components in the best condition.

Speaking of numbers, except for some exceptions such as falls or stages where the use of specific equipment is required, in a major tour we change chains twice, drivetrain parts three times, while for brake pads it depends on the weather conditions. Bad weather conditions, such as rainy days, significantly increases their consumption. As for tubeless tyres, we replace approximately 60-70 tyres. Most are not punctured but need replacing due to use and damage.

ABOVE: Each rider has four road bikes for the Tour de France.

ABOVE RIGHT AND OPPOSITE: Support staff work hard behind the scenes throughout the Tour.

Kabir Lenzi, Head Masseur

What is the after-stage recovery procedure?

Immediately after the finish, each rider receives a standardised recovery pack containing a protein shake, some seasonal high-glycemic index fruits, and a portion of pasta or rice with a protein-based sauce (like tuna or ham).

While the core formula is consistent, we adjust volumes (roughly +/– 30 %) according to individual body mass and race file data.

Massage: Each rider is attended to by only one massage therapist for the entire tour, so everyone knows the rider's needs. Every massage therapist knows the best treatment for their rider, step by step.

We also have a physiotherapist who takes care of the athletes every day.

Laura Martinelli, Lead Performance Nutritionist

How many bottles and musettes are used during the race, are they new every day, and what's the mix of what goes in them?

We send 4,500 bottles in total, new every day (the number depends on the weather). Normally, there is one musette for each rider per stage. The bottles contain carbo water (40g), big carbo (80g), and Isobuffer (40g carbs + bicarbonate).

Our three core mixes contain 40g of carbohydrates in plain water (carbo bottle), which is designed to provide a steady energy release during moderate-intensity efforts. Then, 80g of carbohydrates in plain water (big carbo bottle), formulated to maximise intestinal absorption and support high-intensity or prolonged efforts.

Both carbohydrate drink mixes feature a 2-1 glucose-fructose ratio to enhance carbohydrate uptake and minimise gastrointestinal stress. Electrolyte formula (carbohydrate-free) is designed to support hydration during shorter sessions when carbohydrate intake is not required and for longer training/races in hot weather conditions. Every drink mix is prepared to performance-grade standards under refrigerated conditions and is colour-coded to prevent confusion.

Can you tell us about in race feeds?

Only a few years ago, our approach was far more repetitive: feeding bags rarely varied from one race to the other, both because sports-nutrition science was less advanced, and the industry offered fewer product options.

Nowadays, each feed bag composition is tailored according to several factors, such as the logistics of the day, weather conditions, and race peculiarities.

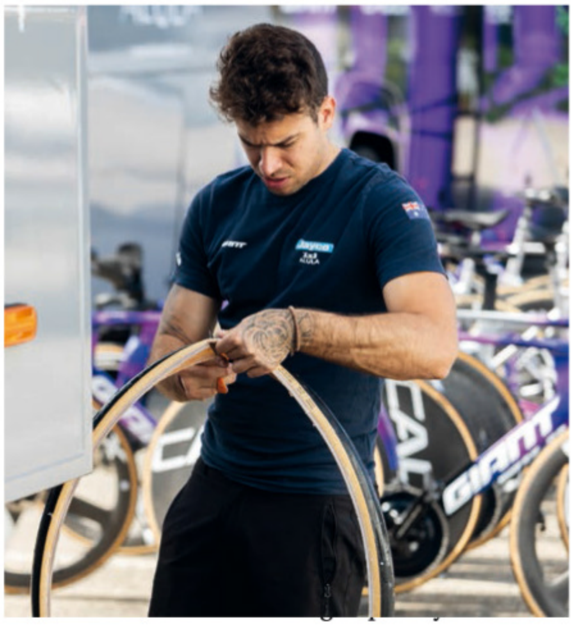
While true individual bag composition can be constrained by logistics on race day, nowadays, each feed bag composition is tailored to the individual rider's needs and preferences.

We will also fine-tune the content for major races or decisive stages to match the leader's preferences.

How does the catering system work?

Four dedicated team chefs manage catering for virtually every race. For almost every event (including TDF), one team chef travels with the

> “IF YOU GO INTO THE RACE WITH A PLAN OF WHAT YOU THINK WILL HAPPEN, YOU ALSO HAVE TO BE ADAPTABLE.”



ABOVE: Team training ride for Jayco Team Service Course (SSC/Team BaseAlUla.

perishable food (pasta, tomato sauce, specialty flours, canned tuna, etc). Upon arrival at each hotel, the chef sources fresh ingredients (meat, fish, seasonal fruits, and vegetables) from local markets to guarantee optimal taste and nutrient density.

When hotel lists are confirmed in advance, we often pre-order key ingredients through the hotel's supplier so that our chef has a foundational pantry waiting on arrival (a precious head-start when the first meal must be on the table just hours later).

Because we typically change hotels daily, the chef's routine centres on preparing dinner and breakfast at each hotel, plus the recovery meal that riders eat on the bus after the race.

Once breakfast service wraps, the chef breaks down the setup, reloads the truck, and drives on to the next hotel, where the cycle begins all over again. This ensures our riders receive consistent, performance-tailored nutrition.

On tour

TOUR DE FRANCE STAFF

- 7 Masseurs
- 1 Physiotherapist
- 1 Chef
- 1 Nutritionist
- 4 Mechanics
- 1 Bus driver
- 1 PR/media person
- 1 Video maker
- 5 Sports directors
- Plus, other staff for parts of the race

VEHICLES

- 6 team cars
- 1 Caravelle (mini van)
- 1 food truck
- 1 team bus
- 1 mechanics' truck
- 1 refrigerated van

EACH RIDER HAS THE FOLLOWING:

- 4 road skinsuits
- 4 summer skinsuits
- 2 TT skinsuits
- 3 standard kits (jersey & shorts)
- 3 summer kits
- Plus socks, gloves, hats and bad weather gear.

Daisy Zorzo, Logistics Manager

Where is the Team Service Course (SSC/Team Base) located?

The service course is located in Brunello, near Varese in Northern Italy. It is a two-story building used by the men's and women's teams, as well as the development team.

Can you explain the clothing and laundry system?

The laundry will be done every day after the stage on the truck (we use WalBike products).

In the two race cars, each rider has a rain bag with rain jackets inside and one or two spare kits. Some rain jackets and vests are also in the cars for use on long descents or in bad weather.

Sadhbh O'Shea, Press Officer & Sam Flanagan, Video Maker

What is the media situation within the team?

The media team consists of a press officer and a video maker. A video of about three minutes is produced daily, and a video recap is produced weekly. The press officer manages the team's social media by publishing the stage presentation, race photos, and final daily report (which depends on the result). BA

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Ben O'Clock

The Tour de France is looming large. Peter Maniaty caught up with Ben O'Connor for a candid and wide-ranging chat as the Western Australian commenced his final build-up towards the Grand Depart in Lille on 5 July.

WORDS: PETER MANIATY

He's won multiple grand tour stages. He's stood on podiums. He's worn leader's jerseys. After almost a decade in the WorldTour peloton and four seasons with Decathlon-AG2R, Ben O'Connor will soon roll out for his 11th grand tour and 4th Tour de France. But this time will be a little different for the 29-year-old from Subiaco, following his move to Jayco AlUla in the offseason. History will be made when Christian Prudhomme waves the red flag to commence Stage 1 in Lille; it will be the first time the Australian squad has an Australian GC leader at the Tour. No pressure then.

The Spring Classics are done. How has the switch to Jayco AlUla been so far?

The move has been quite straightforward, really, especially compared to when I joined AG2R with the whole French language thing and not really knowing anyone. In terms of performance, it's always hard when you join a new team; you can't really judge until the season is over, but right now, I'm in a happy place moving across to Jayco AlUla.

Do you feel any pressure as an Aussie GC guy coming in to lead the Aussie team?

I wouldn't say I feel pressure from the team, it's more within myself. You always want to start winning straight away, but things don't always align. The way this season has been so far, I haven't really hit my max in any race. I'm still off what I've done in the past, but everything still lines up for a good summer. Grand tours are where I've probably had most of my success.

You've been a pro for almost 10 years now. Does that experience help you stay calm?

It does, but if this (slow start) happened to me at the beginning of last year, I would have been in all sorts to be honest. I'd already decided I wanted to move on from AG2R, not because I hated the team, but because it was the right moment for a change. Having made that decision, I obviously wanted to have the freedom of choice (of teams), so it was important to have a good season.

In terms of this season, it's about remembering what I can do. It's easy to get carried away and put yourself down, but it was only last year I was fourth in the Giro, I had the leader's jersey at la Vuelta for two weeks and then the World Championships (silver medal) on top of the cake. In training I've actually been getting better numbers than last year, it just hasn't quite lined up in races yet. But I know what's there, where my competitive capabilities are and what my capacity is. It's actually quite a nice feeling knowing 'I can do this, I've done this before, it will happen.'

After four reasonably intense seasons with AG2R, can you explain what's it like to be inside the French team?

It's very different in the big French teams, especially AG2R. It's more like a French company than a team. Many of the staff have worked there for a very long time, 20 or 30 years, and they have a huge personal attachment, so if there's failure it can be quite emotionally damaging. That's quite different to how most other teams work where, sure, people can be disappointed, but at AG2R

PHOTO CREDIT: VERONIKA SCHOBERER JAYCO-ALULA

it can feel like you've personally let everyone down because they just have so much passion for the team and the sport. I'm not saying people within Jayco AlUla or other international teams don't love it. But at AG2R they really couldn't see anything else but cycling; they'll work within that sphere for life. It's everything for them.

The other thing that's changed fundamentally in your life is becoming a dad. How has that affected your cycling?
What I would say is rather than just working towards personal success, it now comes to the whole family. My wife and I always had in the back of our minds that we were going to start a family, obviously it's very real now with all the parenting stuff.

Is it hard to be away from the family?
It's just the nature of being a professional athlete. You can't overthink that. If you miss being away from home all the time, then it's probably not the best job really.

The Ardennes Classics have just finished, where you lined up in all three of the big races. What's your plan now?
I've been training for quite a long time, since November more or less, so I'll take some time off to reset. Then I'll go to altitude for a couple of weeks, before doing either the Dauphiné or Tour de Suisse. They're both reasonably similar, one week between them, both eight days with rolling hilly stages and mountain stages. We'll decide soon.

The other big decision is team make-up. Do you already know who's going to be with you at the Tour?
In general we have a pretty good idea of who's going where for the season as a whole, especially the grand tours. This team usually takes two leaders to the Tour, like in the past with Dylan (Groenewegen) and Simon (Yates). I think it will be a similar path this year.

What do you make of the Tour de France route this year?
It's probably a little more traditional than the last couple of years, especially last year. This time there's one week of chaos, one stage in the Massif Central and a lot of mountain stages with big, long climbs – 12 kilometres plus, at

ABOVE: O'Connor in the race leader's jersey on Stage 13 of the 2024 Vuelta a España.

ABOVE RIGHT: O'Connor on the podium receiving the race leader's jersey on Stage 16 of the 2024 Vuelta a España..

least half an hour to one hour. Those stages suit me very well. But the first week is pretty gnarly with short uphill finishes on quite technical and narrow roads; it's going to be a real dice roll with lots of guys playing for the win. The Tour hasn't really had that for a while.

It seems you have a photographic memory of the route already.

Yeah, I've looked at it a fair bit. One or two of the stages I've done before like Mûr-de-Bretagne (Stage 7). We did that a few years ago, it's quite straightforward. But overall it's an interesting route. If you get through that first week, then yes, it suits me quite well. But the first week is going to be super important to the way the whole race plays out. It's a bit of a nightmare for someone like me, but if you're that style of rider, like an Alaphilippe or a Pogačar, there's so much opportunity. It's going to be an exciting opening week for the spectators.

One of the iconic days will be Stage 16 with the summit finish on Ventoux. What are your thoughts?

We climbed Ventoux twice back in 2021, I have terrible memories from that day. It was super hot and I didn't manage the heat well. I just absolutely detonated. But the rest of that Tour was okay and I finished fourth overall; it was a sweet, sweet memory. This year's Ventoux stage shouldn't actually be that hard – unless it's windy. The trickier stages come earlier in the Pyrenees, the Hautacam (Stage 12) and then the finish up to Superbagnères (Stage 14), they're going to be epic days. That's going to be the real crux of the race where you have bigger time gaps. On the Ventoux stage if you finish close to the top five or even top ten, there probably isn't going to be more than a minute and a half, maybe two minutes lost. But on those big mountain stages it can be three minutes, five minutes, it can be all sorts depending on how the race is ridden. Those are the days that really get the blood pumping.

Tadej Pogačar will start as the hot favourite. Can you talk about the psychology of racing against him?

Obviously Tadej is pretty amazing and they're a team (UAE Team Emirates XRG) with an almost limitless budget. Their best guys are strong enough to ride hard enough to detonate things in most races pretty early. But that's just the nature of the sport at the moment. If you take it with anger or sourness, you're going to start each race with pretty low motivation. You have to be ready to execute each day as best as you can. That's what drives you for the result at the finish line, whether it's a one-day race, a one-week race or a three-week grand tour. Obviously, you wish you

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could have a chance, you wish you could be that good, but in the end, not everyone's going to be good as Messi playing football either. Probably when I stop racing I can say, upon reflection, I rode in one the great times of cycling with one of the best guys in history, if not the best.

Given all this, what does a successful Tour de France look like? How high are you aiming?
I think to finish in the top five would be an excellent, excellent result. I just want to be as competitive as possible. It doesn't have to be completely smooth, but I'd love to go through the Tour with a run of performances like I've done at la Vuelta and the Giro, and see where that puts me by the time we get to Paris. The last time I did the Tour (2023) I lost my level and started to fade rather than carrying my form throughout the race. So that's my number one thing, be in that front GC group battling with the best guys. I know if I'm doing that, I'm going to definitely be within the top 10 and who knows where that then finds you? I've had it before in 2021 finishing fourth which was unreal, I would love to be doing that again. There's nothing better than the Tour with hundreds of thousands of people watching each stage and just being there with the best guys at the front. It's a pretty special feeling.

> "I WOULDN'T SAY I FEEL PRESSURE FROM THE TEAM, IT'S MORE WITHIN MYSELF."

PHOTO CREDIT: VERONIKA SCHOBERER JAYCO-ALULA

Looking beyond July, you've indicated you're keen for another crack at la Vuelta. What about the World Championships in Kigali? You're the reigning silver medalist, any talks with the Aussie team about Rwanda?
We've spoken about it. Obviously it's something that would come after the two grand tours, but it would be sweet to do that again. I really enjoy racing in the Aussie jersey, I always have, but I've only done Worlds twice, Wollongong and Zurich, so I'm still fairly new to that.

This year's Worlds course appears to really suit you, there's a massive amount of climbing, something like 5,500 metres of elevation gain.
Yeah, it's a huge amount of climbing, plus a gnarly cobbled climb, always rolling up and down. It's at really high altitude too (Kigali is 1,500+ metres above sea level). Looking at the next three years there's also Montreal which I'm told is very hilly and after that is Haute-Savoie Mont Blanc which is going to be super hilly. It's a nice period with the next three World Championships, knowing you could be in with a shout. Hopefully, I can put in more performances like Zurich.

On the subject of championships, you didn't come back for RoadNats this year which were in your home state. How did you feel watching from Europe?
I was so jealous. I wished I was there, but we had our newborn last year and it was a good opportunity to have a full winter in Europe, especially living where I do (Andorra) with the snow, it's a pretty different experience. But I can tell you I'll be in Perth next year. I can't wait to rock around Kings Park. It's a sweet circuit, lots of fun. I love it. BA

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Women on wheels

When Australian Olympic gold medalist Grace Brown began cycling, the chances of spotting another female rider were slim, but things are changing as Sam Coombs found out.

WORDS: SAM COOMBS

The revolution of cycling women

"If I saw another female out there on the roads, I would know her," claims Brown, who has forged a successful career in a sport long dominated by men. Indicative of a time where very few women were on the road on two wheels, times have changed, where one in three cyclists on bike paths are now women. A gradual movement brought on by several factors, Australian women are not only embracing road cycling, recreationally and professionally, but creating an exciting and much-needed shift towards female inclusivity, attitudes, and opportunity for younger generations.

Any seasoned road cyclist in this country would have noticed an increase in the number of women joining the ranks. Female cycle groups are popping up and swelling in numbers, as is female participation in cycling club memberships and international bike tours.

Female competitive road cycling events are presenting greater opportunities like never before and with an unprecedented spike in marketing, branding and media visibility, women's professional cycling is undergoing something of a revolution, with media coverage of female cycling events having piqued the interest of women taking up recreational riding across the country and inspiring younger fans to get on board.

According to Bicycle Network – Australia's biggest bike riding organisation, which promotes the sport through cycling events, activities, and improving riding conditions throughout the nation – female participation in cycling is steady and rising.

"At Bicycle Network, we've observed strong growth in participation among female riders, particularly on rail trails, gravel paths, and through the rise of e-bikes," says the not-for-profit organisation, whose own events have witnessed an uptick in female riders.

Safety, as Brown notes, has been a particular barrier for many women. "Women do tend to be risk-averse," she notes, acknowledging that while the leisure side of the sport has taken off with women's groups, safety remains a key issue for many female road cyclists, with improved safety through enhanced infrastructure the key drivers behind the recreational cycling momentum.

According to recent research carried out by Monash University, a survey of more than 700 participants shed some light on the underlying concerns that hold women back from embracing road cycling.

From those interviewed, 61 per cent of women cited concerns about cycling in traffic deterring them from road cycling, while knowledge gaps in buying a bike and confidence in its maintenance, changing a tyre, etc. rated highly as a barrier to women as opposed to men.

"There are changes that need to be made at the local level," notes Brown, who believes inclusivity and knowledge are paramount.

"Many women are going into bike shops and coming up against condescending attitudes that they don't know anything about cycling. But

Australian women are embracing road cycling, both recreationally and professionally, in record numbers.

ABOVE: Tour de France Femmes avec Zwift 2022. Photo credit: A.S.O. Thomas Maheux

OPPOSITE: Grace Brown celebrates the win in the 2024 World Championships Elite Women's Time Trial.

what needs to happen instead is that women are supported and provided with contextual information, so they are confident in their ability to solve problems on a bike on their own."

The growing need for the cycling industry to properly address inclusivity through specific clothing design has seen brands like Liv, Muze and Birds on Bikes catering to the female form through their apparel designs, fit and style.

With female cycling communities and hubs all around the country, like Wheel Women, Chicks Who Ride Bikes, Ladies Back on Your Bike, and Pink Flamingoes, to name a few, there has never been a greater wave of encouragement for women getting out on two wheels. Empowering and inspiring women from all backgrounds to ride, these groups not only provide safety in numbers and promote a love of cycling, but offer skill-building opportunities, a crucial factor for many women breaking into the sport.

Homegrown events are popular with female participation more than ever too, with both the Bowral Classic and Mudgee Classic seeing a spike in female participation, with the latter comprising 22 per cent of female riders in this year's event. While not quite halfway there in gender representation (yet), it's certainly a step in the right direction with a likely upward trend.

Cycling clubs are also keen to get women on board with clubs like St Kilda Cycling Club actively encouraging women to join the ranks, Brisbane's Kangaroo Point Cycling Club and Rapha Sydney offering dedicated women's cycling rides, while Perth's popular Roues Chaudes (a la Hot Wheels) consists of a healthy 40 per cent membership of female riders.

Cycling tour operators are also witnessing a trend of increased female participation, whether it be women joining their partners on a cycling tour for the first time (like this writer) or simply seeking more adventurous ways to explore a country. Fremantle-based founder and guide of PuntoTours, Vince Ulgiati, who runs road cycling tours both in Australia and overseas, believes there is a huge growth market for female cyclists, and that touring is something women shouldn't be afraid to tackle.

"As a tour company, we've definitely seen an increase in women wanting to tour, either on their own or with their partners, and women are increasingly becoming more confident in tackling rides overseas," says Ulgiati, whose touring team openly encourages and supports female riders of all abilities.

So what else has also helped buck the trend? Aside from encouragement from governing bodies, a spike in community groups, women's cycling clubs, improved infrastructure, advocacy, and a sweeping shift in attitudes, like any sport's success, visibility is king.

Professional cycling – a shift in visibility

For years, to watch women's cycling events on TV, you had to not only sign up for a specialist streaming service, but you could only watch it on delay. With the launch of Tour de France Femmes three years ago, an event that had been lobbied for over considerable time, a significant shift in how women's cycling was perceived took hold. A tipping point, or a shift in the gears, women finally had their own professional platform to showcase their competitive skills, with unprecedented media coverage not only live, but also beaming back footage of huge crowds of supportive followers.

Similarly, when The Matilda's soccer team was headlining our TV screens throughout the World Cup last year, Australian clubs in the 2024 winter football season experienced a record influx of registrations, with Football NSW reporting a 34 per cent increase from females.

When the "Matilda Effect" took hold, thanks to expansive media coverage, the place of Australian women in contemporary sport witnessed a massive shift in the right direction.

For cycling, its own 'Matilda Effect' was witnessed in 2022, with the Tour de France Femmes cyclists tackling an 8-stage Tour, iconic roads, sprinting to stage victories, and racing head-to-head in a way comparable to the men's most prestigious cycling event.

When interactive global cycling platform Zwift, became the Tour de Femmes title sponsor, women's cycling fell under the spotlight like never before, reaching an audience of 23.2 million in its 2022 TV broadcast. Social media reach and engagement shot up for the top five women's cycling races and riders and teams received a significant boost, paving the way for future innovation and rapid growth.

With an audience including young girls, inspiration for tomorrow's talent ran high, showcasing the very real opportunities available to female cyclists dreaming to partake in the sport's highest level.

Brand power

With progressive attitudes towards gender roles, particularly among younger generations, thanks to an enhanced media visibility, not only is there a wider support for competitive female cyclists, but somewhat of a fan base never seen before, providing a powerhouse of commercial potential.

According to Deloitte and Wasserman's The Collective, recent research indicates that brands have increased their investment in women's sports by more than 80 per cent over the past five years. For the cycling industry, where female competitive events are garnering more and more media attention, cameras rolling and social media posts can only be a good thing.

Case in point, when Liv, a cycling brand completely dedicated to women, sponsored the Tour de France Femmes avec Zwift, the

23mill

The number of TdFF TV viewers in 2022

SHIMANO SHIMAN

ABOVE: Cycling clubs are also keen to get women on board like inner west Sydney club, Lidcombe-Auburn Cycle Club (LACC).

young audience was watching female riders both on the road and on the podium donning their gear. It's this kind of exposure where brands become synonymous with the future generations of the sport.

With women athletes as powerful brand ambassadors, a growing trajectory of women's sports, and a movement for gender equality both socially and within the sporting industry, investing in female cycling is a no-brainer.

There is no doubt that all sports across the spectrum have progressively witnessed an uptick in women's participation, narrowing the gender divide and opening up myriad opportunities once only available to men. When it comes to remuneration, cycling, it seems, may have an edge on equality stakes compared to others.

"I do think cycling has benefited women more so than in other sports, in terms of payment", says Brown, who acknowledges the ever-slow-changing gender divide in prize money.

"When I first turned pro, the money for women was far less than now. At the time, any female cyclist wouldn't have thought there was an opportunity to make money, but thankfully, for me, during the time between starting my career and at the end it, there was financial remuneration."

She also acknowledges the tireless commitment behind the scenes to pave the way for women in other areas that matter.

"Job security, workers' rights, maternity leave, a lot of progress," says Brown.

"With racing, we're pushing constantly, not just with remuneration but with visibility, technology, team resources and safety until we're equal to the men's side of the sport."

It's a sentiment widely shared. Natalie Saunders at the School of Exercise & Nutrition Sciences, agrees that while there's been progress, there are still inroads to be made.

"While some wonderful things are happening in women's cycling, there are always challenges and opportunities to advance the sport. With greater visibility of women competing, we are seeing increased participation of women on bikes, which is fantastic, to have more women gaining the benefits of cycling.

"However, for me, one of the biggest changes is how women can now pursue a professional career in cycling. Twenty or so years ago, that wasn't an option, but now, it's far more attractive for women to have a career in the sport," she says.

"There is an impactful drive for women now that they can be remunerated for their cycling, and girls can grow up knowing they can make a career out of this opportunity. We need the sport to continue growing however, so even more talent is attracted to cycling."

According to Deloitte's research, we are also seeing a shift in how audiences consume sport. Media rights value for women's sports is growing at a much faster rate than men's, while growing investment in live-streaming and broadcasting is opening doors to increased engagement. Brands have also increased their investment in women's sports by more than 80 per cent over the past five years, unlocking unprecedented value.

It's often said that a true advancement in society is providing better opportunities for the next generation. For women's cycling, the divide between opportunities present and past couldn't be greater. With more and more girls and women cycling at the grassroots recreational level, gaining confidence, watching women compete at a professional level successfully, investment in the form of sponsorship and marketing will surely grow, paving the way for future female talent.

For the first gold medalist recipient of the Paris Olympic Games, Grace Brown is optimistic the sport is moving in the right direction. "I'm excited to see this sport going places," says Brown. "And I can't wait to see what's up ahead." BA

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Chris Palmer in his intimate rural workshop.

Handmade bikes are being built in workshops across Australia by frame builders who you've probably not heard of. Alison McGregor shared her insights.

WORDS: ALISON MCGREGOR

When you imagine the world's most revered custom bikes, your mind might drift to the foothills of Italy, to builders like Gianni Pegoretti or Cicli Barco who've built reputations on generations of craftsmanship. Or perhaps to the States, brands like Firefly Bicycles, Moots, or Lynskey strike your imagination. But some of the most innovative and high-performance bikes aren't coming from overseas. They're being built in workshops across Australia.

From the engineering precision of Mark Hester at Prova Cycles, to Chris Palmer's intimate rural workshop, to the determined momentum of Sean Doyle at Devlin Bikes, a different narrative is taking shape. One not built on heritage, but on grit, innovation, and the quiet belief that handmade still matters.

This feature draws from time spent inside each builder's workspace, amid the tools, machines, and decisions that define the rhythm of Australian custom frame building. While each voice is distinct, together, they speak to a shared resilience and resistance: a deliberate counter to the polished uniformity of mass-manufactured cycling.

The rise of the independent builder: trust

Not long ago, especially in the pre-1990s, Australia had a thriving local frame-building scene. Walk into a shop, and your frame might've been welded just down the road. But the advent of carbon moulds, standard sizing, and globalised production shifted everything. Factories across Italy, England, and the US were swallowed by the industry's appetite for mass output.

Today, Australia has around 30 active custom builders. Fewer than five work with titanium or carbon in-house. Most are one-person operations. Many juggle other jobs.

Mark Hester, founder of Prova Cycles, one of the country's most advanced and internationally recognised titanium and carbon frame builders, knows this challenge well.

"I think one of the biggest hurdles is just trust," he says. "You're asking someone to invest several thousand dollars in something they can't test-ride or see beforehand. That's tough when they've grown up only seeing major brands dominate the conversation."

Sean Doyle of Devlin Cycles agreed: "You're not just building a frame. You're trying to build a reputation, one rider at a time. And sometimes that rider doesn't even know this world exists."

This resurgence in Australian frame building isn't about nostalgia or aesthetics – it's about engineering precision and rider connection. Builders like Doyle, Hester, and Palmer are crafting performance machines designed around individual goals: climbing efficiency, gravel endurance, downhill performance, and outright speed.

What they offer, though, is irreplicable: a rider-first process where every millimetre of geometry, tubing, and layup is calibrated for one body. Contrary to perception, handmade doesn't mean amateur. These are trained engineers – aerospace, automotive, and industrial design veterans who've simply chosen to work with a human scale.

"It's amazing how connected people feel to the product when they've watched it go from a box of tubes to a finished bike, and they know who built it," Hester told me.

Custom bikes made by expert builders remove the guesswork. When a bike is built around your proportions, power transfer, and terrain, the results endure, long past the next product cycle.

That kind of trust isn't mass-produced. It's forged slowly, in workshops, through listening, fitting, building, and following through.

Precision, not production: the case for custom

In a world where mass-market bikes are built to fixed geometries, the work of builders like Doyle, Hester, and Palmer feels almost defiant. But this argument would be misleading, because the core of their motivation is focused and simple: to produce incredible frames for individual riders.

Chris Palmer, from his modest workshop in Victoria's Macedon Ranges, hand-lays carbon plies with surgical precision. With a background in automotive engineering, specifically chassis dynamics, he brings a Formula One-level understanding to frame feel and performance.

"In cars, you're always chasing that balance – stiffness, compliance, weight distribution – all to give the driver a feel that's connected and predictable on the road. Bikes are no different," Palmer told me. "You're tuning the frame to respond to the rider, not just the terrain."

To achieve that, he's built everything himself: compression moulds, CNC cutters, even a frame-sized carbon curing oven. Each layup is designed in CAD, composed of 60-70 carbon plies, and hand-laid to suit the rider's weight, style, and goals.

While aesthetics draw attention, these builders aren't romanticising the craft – they're engineers applying analytical, performance-driven thinking.

At Prova, Mark Hester brings his aerospace composite background to bear. Structural integrity isn't assumed – it's engineered. His use of 3D-printed parts isn't a novelty; it's optimisation. His frames are a success not only for their looks but also for their perfect weight balance, future serviceability, and responsiveness.

Proper geometry improves power delivery, reduces injury risk, and enhances endurance. Whether it's an all-day Alpine climber or a gravel rig that keeps its line through chatter, this is what custom means: not just choosing colours, but defining performance – and having it built around you.

Engineers, riders, craftsmen, and entrepreneurs

What unites these builders isn't just a commitment to craft – they're engineers and riders first.

Mark Hester, with a background in automotive composites, spent years at Ford and Honda before taking a frame-building course in the UK, discovered, fittingly, at a bike race.

"I just wanted to build a frame for myself," he recalls. "Then a couple of friends asked, and it snowballed from there." When someone outside his city ordered a bike after seeing it on Instagram, Prova Cycles became a full-time pursuit.

Sean Doyle currently juggles engineering work while drawing from a competitive racing past. He gradually shifts to full-time building, having relocated Devlin Cycles to Tasmania, at the base of Maydena Bike Park.

"It's a double-edged sword," Doyle said of the move. "You have space and clarity, but also fewer opportunities for collaboration. There's no one to bounce ideas off. No chance to drop by another builder's shop to share a jig or talk through an issue."

Chris Palmer, too, stepped away from Melbourne's dense builder community for the quiet of the Macedon Ranges. "Being out of Melbourne is a bit more difficult to grow – being closer to Melbourne's cycling culture would definitely help to become more known," he tells me.

Distance from Australia's major cycling hubs limits visibility, but creates space for innovation.

Fortunately, the country's established builders haven't pulled the ladder up. Both Llewellyn and Baum are widely credited by emerging builders for offering advice, tools, and mentorship when it mattered most.

First impressions matter, but performance is the core

Chris Palmer understands this well. His meticulous carbon layups aren't just about structural performance – they're visual signatures. "It's the look," he says when asked what people first notice. Aesthetics draw riders in, spark curiosity, and start the conversation. But it's the ride – the performance, the fit, the feel – that keeps them engaged.

In a market awash with visual sameness, distinctive design still cuts through. Whether it's the exposed carbon weave of a Palmer, the raw titanium of a Prova, or the flawless fillet brazing on a Devlin, each builder uses material finish and detail to elevate the experience.

But for every aesthetic flourish, there's depth underneath. A common misperception is that custom bikes are prized mainly for their looks. For builders like Prova, Devlin, and Palmer, beauty is just the entry point. The real craft lies in how the bike performs – how it climbs, corners, and connects rider to terrain.

The outsourcing dilemma and what riders need to know

As Australia's custom bike scene grows, some brands are turning to overseas manufacturing to reduce overheads and increase scale. Names like Curve and Bossi are transparent about the shift. Others, less so – obscuring outsourced production behind brand language and polished marketing.

"There's nothing wrong with outsourcing," Mark Hester told me. "But it's not the same thing as building a bike from scratch with your own hands, in your own workshop. That's a different conversation."

With builders like Palmer, Prova, or Devlin, the frame isn't just Australian by name – it's Australian in process. From initial consultation to final build, each step happens here: fitting, geometry, material selection, welding or layup, communication, finishing, and even component assembly.

This isn't just a bike. It's a relationship embedded in your ride and your belief in Australian craft.

The shifting spotlight: where builders stand in a changing industry

It's an irony not lost on the builders: many Australian riders are more familiar with boutique brands from the US or Europe than those built in their own backyard. When I asked Sean Doyle what success looks like, his answer was telling: "It's being on the short list for someone's dream bike. Like, they turn 40, want something special, and they're considering Baum, Prova... and Devlin. Just to be on that list would be cool."

It's a quiet ambition – but a powerful one.

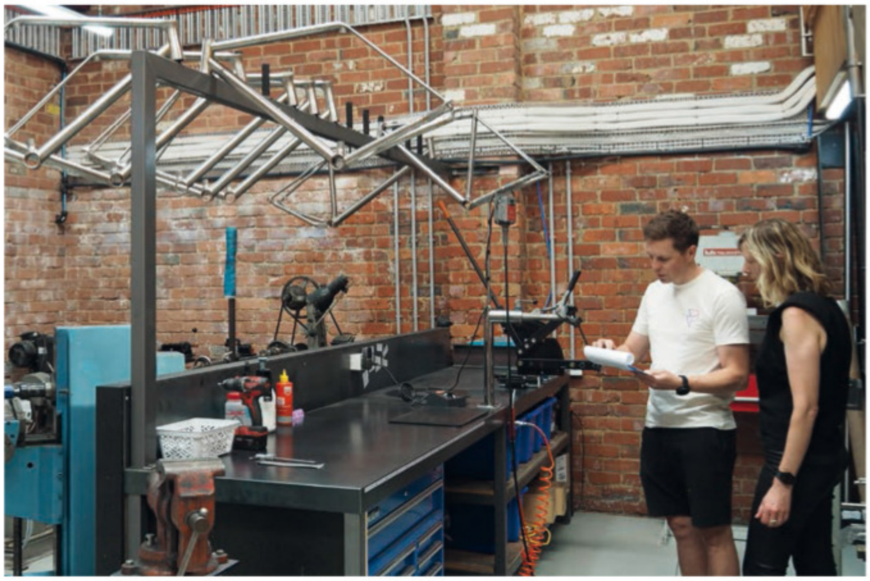
Events like SPOKEN (previously known as the Australian Handmade Bike Builders Show) have long played a vital role in spotlighting handmade talent, connecting builders, riders, and media. The exposure has been invaluable.

Palmer commented, "With robots and AI, the manufacture of bikes could be very different in 10 years. I hope that handmade items will be even more sought after. I aim to straddle that gap – with bikes that perform while retaining a classic style."

Because what these builders offer isn't just craftsmanship – it's proof that cycling can still be personal, local, and deeply human. BA

OPPOSITE: Sean Doyle at Devlin Bikes.

BELOW: Mark Hester at Prova Cycles speaks with Alison McGregor.



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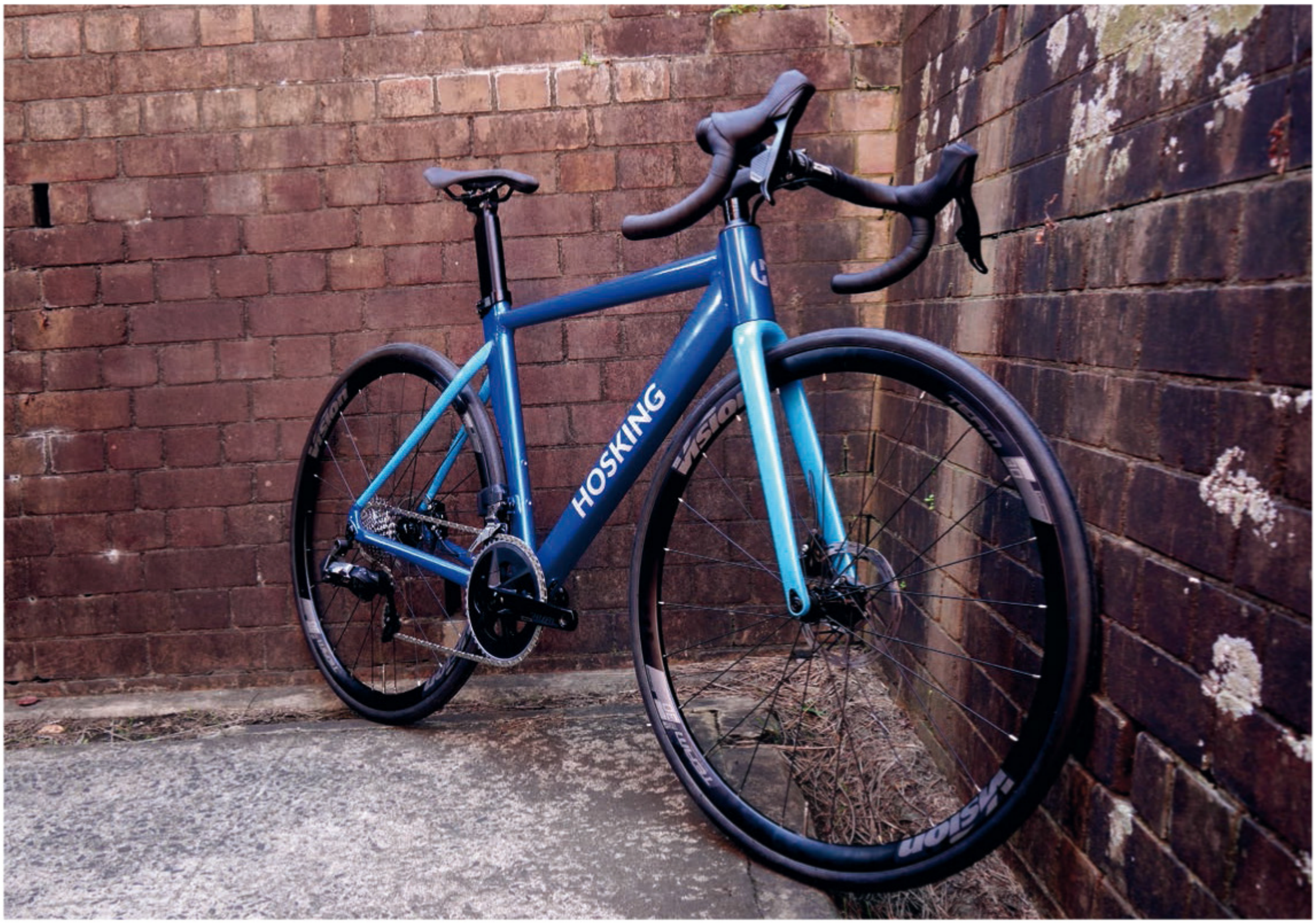

Hosking HR1

Hundreds of bikes have been reviewed in the pages of Bicycling Australia over the years. Typically, they've been upper tier models, high spec and equally high priced, so when Peter Maniaty had the opportunity to sample the entry-level road offering from Hosking Bikes he grasped it with both hands.

WORDS: PETER MANIATY

Let's cut straight to it, shall we? The HR1 from Hosking Bikes isn't the lightest build. It isn't the fastest or the most aero. Nor does it have the most advanced carbon components. What it does have, however, is a whole lot of commonsense thanks to a wonderfully versatile alloy frame, 12-speed wireless electronic shifting and sharp value for money. Even better, rather than a generic off-the-shelf open mould, the HR1 boasts the same proprietary HR frame that features across all Hosking models, developed with direct input from Chloe Hosking in partnership with Jayu Yang, a highly respected and influential figure in Taiwan's billion-dollar cycling industry.

Chloe herself describes the HR1 as "the perfect first bike" and it's hard to argue. “At the heart of our philosophy is making bikes more accessible and affordable, especially for people who aren’t cycling natives,” she explains, pointing to the very intentional choice of aluminium frames over carbon. “Aluminium is more affordable and durable which is so important when you’re just starting out. Our frames are also designed to be easily scalable.”

This versatility is central to the Hosking Bikes value proposition according to Chloe’s business partner and husband Jack Lindsay: “You can take the HR frame and build the [top of the range] HR6 and it’ll weigh in right alongside a Cervélo S5…but that frame can also become the HR1, an outstanding first bike that’s built to grow with you.”

First impressions

Prioritising functionality over design gimmicks, the HR1 is a conventionally styled road bike with alloy components from the ground up; the only exception being the carbon fork. The review build is nicely finished with tidy aluminium welds and an eye-catching ‘Icy Blue/Blue’ colour scheme. Picking it up it’s also reasonably heavy; a trait it shares with most entry-level alloy builds. On my home scales measured weight for the HR1 was 9.5kg (54cm frame, no pedals). According to the Hosking website that’s around 1.5kg more than the HR4 model which uses the same frame – meaning the difference relates almost entirely to the wheelset and components. That’s good news; a few strategic upgrades and you could easily shave 500-750 grams, if not more.

Frame & geometry

There isn’t much in the way of overt truncated kammtail tubing, but the HR1 frame is still very much in the mould of an aero race build – unsurprising given the sprint background of its founder. The design boasts a robust downtube, subtly tapered top tube, blade-shaped seat post, rear wheel seat tube cut-out and a low-ish front end with a headtube of just 127mm (54cm frame). The hose routing is clean and largely internal. Looking more closely at the frame dimensions, the HR1 definitely sits on the more compact side with a reasonably short wheelbase (980mm), stack (545mm), reach (382mm) and standover height (760mm). Having said all this, I still found the riding position quite comfortable.

Wheels & components

Whilst higher-tier Hosking models feature carbon rims and lighter groupsets, the only carbon you’ll find on the HR1 is the fork. Everything else is, quite intentionally, alloy including the two-piece cockpit with FSA handlebars and stem. The tubeless-ready Vision Team 30 wheels are a bulletproof specification for an entry-level bike. That said, with an internal rim width of just 19mm they’re quite narrow by modern standards; they’re also hefty at around 1,900 grams. Of course, for most riders the biggest drawcard for the HR1 is the inclusion of the SRAM Rival AXS Wireless 12-Speed groupset, not something you’d typically

ABOVE: The HR1 aluminium frame is very much in the mould of an aero race build.

BELOW: The SRAM RIVAL AXS 12sp, 48/35 crankset.

SRAM
RIVAL
SRAM

HOSKING
Vision

find on an entry-spec bike. Whilst not as refined as its more expensive SRAM AXS siblings, shifting is still smooth and assured, as is braking performance (hydraulic disc, 160mm rotors front and back) – making it an attractive step up from competing builds with mechanical groupsets. As already mentioned, being quite a structurally conventional bike, the HR1 should also be quite straightforward to upgrade in the future as and when your budget allows.

The value

At $3,800, brand new, the HR1 delivers tempting value as a 'first proper bike' and compares favourably with entry-level road offerings from most of the major global brands – especially if you want 12-speed wireless shifting. For me, at this price point the key decision is, do you want a brand new bike that can grow with you? Or do you roll the dice with a higher spec pre-owned bike that might be great, but might also be nothing but trouble? Only you can answer that. If you're interested, the HR alloy frameset and carbon fork can also be purchased as a standalone package for $2,800 RRP.

The ride

Hitting the road, the HR1 proves a capable performer across the board, entirely in keeping with its entry-level characteristics. It certainly isn't a slow bike, but its lighter and higher-spec siblings such as the HR5 and HR6 will undoubtedly be more responsive in a wider variety of riding conditions. In particular, I found the extra weight makes acceleration a little subdued from lower speeds; however, once you build up some momentum the HR1 taps along very nicely.

Alloy frames generally have a reputation for being quite stiff and the HR1 road feel is definitely on the firmer end of the compliance scale, especially with its alloy wheels and components. The ride position is reasonably low and

Proving her metal

Chloe Hosking retired from the pro peloton in 2023, one of the most accomplished Australian road cyclists of her generation. With a palmares boasting Commonwealth Games gold, multiple National Championships and 39 professional road victories, including stage wins at both the Giro d'Italia Internazionale Femminile and La Course by Le Tour de France, you could forgive the now 34-year-old for wanting to put her feet up. But it quickly became clear the Bendigo-born Canberran had zero intention of riding off quietly into the sunset. Hosking, if anything, has been busier than ever in the past two years. She completed an undergraduate Communications degree whilst still racing and has since finished a second degree in Law, founded the Hosking Women in Sport Scholarship and, perhaps most relevantly for this story, set up the world's first female-owned performance bicycle brand, Hosking Bikes, which in addition to creating its own road and gravel frames, currently supports two domestic cycling teams, Analog Racing in Canada and Skyway Racing in the USA. Hosking is on a mission, to be sure – and it's fuelled by alloy, not carbon.

wiggle
HIGH5

LEFT: The SRAM RIVAL AXS Wireless 12sp groupset provides smooth shifting.

RIGHT: Selle Repente NOVA AERON saddle.

compact, but still quite comfortable for short-to-mid distance rides. I found road vibrations became a little more noticeable, especially through my hands, on longer rides and bumpier surfaces which suggests a carbon stem and maybe even carbon bars could be beneficial. The more riding I did, the more I also became convinced running tubeless would be a great way to go; no dramas given the Vision Team 30 rims are tubeless-ready.

Whilst the ease and smoothness of 12-speed wireless shifting was greatly appreciated, the biggest standout for me was actually the way the HR1 handled. As the base model in the HOSKING range, I was expecting it to be a little languid and slow. I was wrong. The HR1 is refreshingly direct and nimble, providing an obedient and balanced ride with plenty of confidence to negotiate obstacles, corners and bunches. I really enjoyed piloting this bike around.

When it comes to hills, the HR1 is unlikely to be the first choice for dedicated climbers. Short pinches and modest ascents? No problem. In fact, I even set a few PBs on my local test climb (3km @ 3.5% average) albeit with a tailwind. Longer and sharper inclines, however, begin to stretch the friendship a little. If I owned the HR1 a lighter carbon wheelset would be the first upgrade on my list – so that's exactly what I tried, swapping out the Vision Team 30 alloy wheels mid-review for a pair of 25mm climbing wheels. Around 500 grams lighter and with wider carbon rims (placing it more on par with the Hosking HR2 model) the difference was immediate; acceleration felt more lively whilst road buzz was noticeably reduced. The key learning, once again, is there's plenty of scope to tinker, experiment and really make this build your own for years to come.

Summing up

Australian-founded, owned and based, HOSKING Bikes is blazing an important trail in a highly competitive market. As its entry-level offering, the HR1 is a critical part of this journey. It's a rock solid option for riders getting into more serious road cycling, be they emerging juniors or adult newcomers. Compare it to a high-end, high-price performance build, and the HR1 will come second in almost every category. But that's not the point. At $3,800, it's unashamedly about getting people on bikes and bums on saddles – and against that criteria, there's plenty to like. It makes a great addition to any 'first bike' shortlist and is well worth checking out.

Hosking Bikes can be purchased directly online or through a growing network of bike stores and retailers across Australia.

More info hoskingbikes.com

Specifications

Hosking HR1

RRP: $3,799 (as reviewed)

Colour: Icy Blue/Blue

Frame: Series 1 HOSKING (Alloy)

Fork: Hosking HR (Carbon)

Handlebar: FSA Omega Compact (Alloy)

Stem: FSA Gossamer Stem (Alloy)

Headset: FSA NO.69 SRS

Saddle: Selle Repente NOVA AERON

Seat post: Al-Steed Aero Black (Alloy)

Brakes: SRAM RIVAL (Flat Mount)

Rotors: SRAM Paceline Centrelock (160mm Front & 160mm Rear)

Shifting: SRAM RIVAL AXS Wireless 12sp

Cassette: SRAM RIVAL AXS 12sp, 10-30T

Chain: SRAM RIVAL D1 12sp

Crankset: SRAM RIVAL AXS 12sp, 48/35

Bottom bracket: SRAM DUB BSA 68 Road Wide

Rims: Vision Team 30 (Alloy clincher, 30mm, tubeless ready)

Tyres: Mitas Rubena Arrow (700 x 28c)

Clearance (Max): 32mm

Polygon Bend R6X affordable gravel

If you're in the market for something "gravelly," it is tough to determine which bike is right. Luke Meers investigates.

WORDS: LUKE MEERS

I'm not sure if you've noticed that the bike market is getting more and more nuanced. Do you need something aggressive and CX in style, or more bike-packing and ready to ride for days? Do you want something for competitive gravel events or exploring local firetrails and doubling as a commuter? It's messy, and to be fair, which geometry style suits which use-type depends on who you ask. With the Bend series, the Indonesian company Polygon is offering a bike that aims to provide enough versatility for the buyer to keep their options open.

First impressions

You've probably seen advertisements in your social feed for Polygon or its main point of sale in Australia, the website Bicyclesonline.com.au. Like I did at first, you might assume that their range would be cheap, generic, and low quality. There's a strong case, however, that the business model they've adopted is modern and effective in delivering bikes at a very competitive price-quality ratio. They have a global design team and a vertically integrated manufacturing setup in Indonesia, which they claim allows for tighter

quality control throughout construction and assembly. I have friends who own Polygon road bikes, but this was my first experience riding one myself.

Frame & construction

The Bend R6X sits mid-range in the Bend line-up – a series built for versatility across terrain from tarmac to trail. The frame is constructed from ALX Advance Alloy, Polygon's proprietary version of hydroformed 6061 aluminium. This material strikes a good balance between durability, ride comfort, and weight. The bike is matched with a full carbon fork, offering improved shock absorption and a premium feel. Both frame and fork are absolutely covered in mounting points – for bottles, racks, top-tube bags, fenders, and more. You could kit this out for ultralight touring or stripped-down gravel racing with equal ease.

The geometry supports this all-purpose ambition. In the Medium size, the stack comes in at around 612mm, reach at about 375mm, with an effective top tube of roughly 550mm. A 74° seat tube angle and generous 1,058mm wheelbase combine to give a relaxed, upright ride posture without feeling sluggish. The 440mm chainstays further enhance its stability, especially when carrying gear. My time on the Medium frame matched these numbers well – the bike felt very predictable and stable, even when the trail got gnarlier than expected.

While I didn't do any epic all-day rides, I was impressed by how comfortable I felt right away. The endurance geometry would be easy to live with on longer adventures. And although it's not pitched as a racer, the Bend R6X didn't shy away from power – I tested its limits on a few local gravel climbs and happily snagged some Strava KOMs with 450 watts pushing through the pedals. It also helps that the frame is dropper-post compatible (27.2mm, internally routed), giving riders even more flexibility for more hectic off-road adventures. The top-tier Bend R9X comes stock with one.

BELOW: The brakes are SRAM Apex hydraulic disc with Paceline 160mm rotors.

The full carbon fork adds to the impressive build quality.

Componentry

The R6X is fitted with the SRAM Apex XPLR AXS 1x12 groupset, a definite highlight of the build. Wireless shifting in this price range is an impressive inclusion, and the performance backed it up. 1x drivetrains are intuitive and dead simple to use – no thinking required, ride – and the AXS system handles shifts with speed and reliability. I did have a couple of chain-jamming issues when in the 11-tooth cog. It could be a limit screw issue, but it wasn't clear to me exactly what caused it. Aside from that minor hiccup, the drivetrain felt tight and capable. The stock setup pairs a 38T chainring with an 11-44T cassette, offering a wide range for climbs while keeping cadence decently high on flatter sections. You might spin out on fast descents or road sections, but for most gravel riding, it's well-suited.

The wheels are Polygon's own: double-walled alloy rims with an internal width of 25mm, laced to Novatec hubs with stainless steel Sapim spokes. They were set up tubeless on my test bike, and I threw a wide range of surfaces at them without issue. They're not ultralight but roll well and feel sturdy enough for heavier riders or gear loads. Upgrading to a carbon wheelset could shave significant weight off the 10.8kg total build. The Maxxis Rambler 700x45c tyres provided excellent grip and comfort, and there's clearance for up to 50mm rubber if you want even more cushioning or traction.

Handling and ride feel

One aspect that stood out during my testing was how the Bend R6X handled on technical gravel descents and loose

SRAM
SRAM
APEX
SRAM

RIGHT: The impressive SRAM Apex XPLR AXS 1x12 groupset is a highlight of the build.

Specifications

Frame: ALX Advance Alloy
Fork: Full carbon
Shifters: SRAM Apex XPLR AXS, 12-speed wireless electronic
Rear Derailleur: SRAM Apex XPLR AXS, 12-speed
Crankset: SRAM Apex 1 Wide, 38T chainring
Cassette: SRAM PG-1231 D1 XPLR, 11–44T, 12-speed
Chain: SRAM Apex D1, 12-speed
Rims: Double-wall alloy, 25mm internal width, tubeless compatible
Hubs: Novatec 32H, centerlock
Tyres: Maxxis Rambler EXO TR 700x45c, tubeless ready
Tyre Clearance: Up to 700x50c
Brakes: SRAM Apex hydraulic disc
Rotors: SRAM Paceline A1 160mm
Handlebar: Alloy 6061DB, 440mm width, 125mm drop, 16° flare
Stem: Alloy, 70mm length, 7° rise
Seatpost: Leadtec 27.2mm diameter, 350mm length
Saddle: Selle Royal Terra Argo X7
Headset: FSA No.42/ACB Integrated Threadless (1-1/8" - 1.5")
Dropper Post Compatibility: Yes, accepts 27.2mm internally routed
Weight: Approximately 10.8 kg (tubeless setup)
RRP: $3,199

corners. The slightly slacker front end, combined with the long wheelbase and generous tyre clearance, makes the bike feel planted and composed, even when the surface is loose or unpredictable. This confidence-inspiring platform is for riders new to gravel or those wanting more assurance on rougher terrain. It's not ultra-sharp or twitchy like some race-oriented gravel machines, but it strikes an ideal balance between stability and responsiveness. This makes it perfect for long adventure rides, loaded bikepacking, or just spirited weekend exploring.

Practical details

The bike's cables are externally routed at the bars, which won't appeal to everyone visually, but it makes at-home maintenance and repairs far easier – a big plus for anyone heading out into remote areas or doing their own maintenance. There's also a chainstay protector already installed and subtle fender and rack mounts throughout, making this bike fully viable for commuting or touring. The flared handlebars add control on fast descents and rougher terrain, and the stock saddle proved comfortable enough to leave alone for the duration of my testing.

The R6X is available in just one colour at this stage – what I'd call a dusty yellow. I liked the finish, which also includes subtle topographic-style linework on the top tube, but riders who care about colour choice might be disappointed with the lack of options.

Verdict

So, does this versatile gravel/adventure/bikepacking bike hit the mark? I'd definitely say yes. Riding the Bend R6X felt comfortable, confident, and – above all – fun in just about every condition I tested it in. Even on a commute to work, it felt purposeful and lively. At its very competitive price point of $3,199, you're getting a quality alloy frame, an excellent wireless drivetrain, solid wheels, and a geometry that can handle just about anything you throw at it.

Polygon's direct-to-consumer model is clearly working well – they've managed to pack an impressive spec list into a well-rounded, modern gravel bike without the inflated price tags seen elsewhere. Whether you're a weekend explorer, commuter, gravel racer, or bikepacker, the Bend R6X gives you a solid and confidence-inspiring platform with room to grow. It's a do-it-all machine with few compromises – and one that's genuinely enjoyable to ride.

Performance

The Bend delivers a confident and comfortable ride across diverse terrain, handling everything from climbs to commutes, making it a true all-rounder.

Quality

With a high-grade alloy frame, carbon fork, and a reliable groupset, it offers impressive build quality and design features, like dropper post compatibility and extensive mounting points.

Value

At an RRP of $3,199, the Bend R6X represents excellent value with some quality components, modern geometry, and performance that in some ways rivals more expensive bikes. BA

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Wilier Adlar made for explorers

With a custom-built gravel bike ready to go, Alison McGregor headed to the Blue Mountains.

WORDS: ALISON MCGREGOR

You don’t truly know a bike until you’re forced to rely on it – completely.

Not just on bitumen, but when the sealed road disappears, the gravel loosens beneath you, and a sudden pinch climb forces a decision between fight or walk. That’s where I met the Wilier Adlar – on a ride that blurred road, trail, time, and trust.

According to Wilier, the Adlar is “made for bikepacking, for explorers, for bike travellers”. I thought I'd put this quote to the test on varied terrain. What I found was that this frame is built with touring resilience, mountain bike DNA, and gravel-bike responsiveness. More than a methodical tourer, the Adlar is Wilier’s answer to riders who want to go far, carry more, and tackle terrain that doesn’t come with warning signs. And in a region like the Blue Mountains, where the gravel can shift from compact to chaos in a matter of metres, I was ready to see what it could handle.

Frameset: purpose-built balance

At its core, the Adlar is a gravel bike that draws on mountain bike stability without feeling overbuilt. The 70° head angle, long wheelbase, and clearance for 52mm tyres all point to serious intent when it comes to endurance touring. But the real genius is how it handles when loaded.

Wilier’s engineers have clearly focused on maintaining handling neutrality under weight. I’ve ridden bikes that become twitchy or

LEFT: The flared carbon bars are easy to grip and simple to reach the drops.

BELOW: Selle Italia Flite Boost saddle for all-day comfort.

unbalanced once the saddlebags go on, or the weight of the electronic rear hub takes control, where climbing and turning on loose gravel turns into a fight between traction and toppling. The Adlar, by contrast, remained planted and predictable, even on descents that required considerable manoeuvring. On shifty, shale-strewn climbs, where body movement has to be precise, the bike never fought me. It tracked clean lines without losing posture.

At under 10kg, it was light enough to carry when the trail said, "Not today." The numerous mounting points (including fork legs and downtube) also mean water and gear can be distributed evenly, preserving the bike's composure even when fully loaded.

Ride experience: stability you can feel

My test of the Adlar began on hostile bitumen – narrow shoulders, heavy trucks, and debris-strewn climbs. That's where the Campagnolo EKAR drivetrain first proved itself, delivering clean, precise shifts under pressure. The bright lime frame did its part in visibility, but when traffic demands instant acceleration, it's the mechanics that count. In the traffic where trucks pelted past and I was left with a narrow shoulder, it was a considerable relief that the gearing and brakes performed perfectly and the bike responded.

But the real revelation came as the road suddenly gave way to dirt.

Climbing into the Blue Mountains ridgelines, the Adlar felt remarkably settled on loose surface transitions. I've experienced bikes that skid or slide unpredictably under load – where control becomes guesswork. But with the 47mm Vittoria Terreno tyres, wider Deda Gera bars, and the compliant Ergon seatpost, I never second-guessed the bike's response. It was stable without feeling sedated – playful when you wanted it, solid when you needed it.

And that sense of fun? It matters. The Adlar delivered genuine joy – not in bursts, but sustained. When the bike becomes invisible beneath you, when you stop negotiating with your machine and start moving with it, the ride becomes memorable.

Component analysis

CAMPAGNOLO EKAR 1X13 DRIVETRAIN

Simplicity and smoothness define EKAR. The 9-42 cassette is broad, and shifting is both intuitive and firm. That

Specifications (custom build)

Frame: Wilier Adlar Carbon (Lime)

Groupset: Campagnolo EKAR 1x13, 44T chainring, 9-42 cassette

Brakes: EKAR hydraulic, 160mm rotors

Wheels: Campagnolo Levante

Tyres: Vittoria Terreno Dry 700x47mm (Tubeless)

Handlebar: Deda Elementi Gera Carbon Gravel Bar

Seatpost: Ergon Allroad Pro Carbon Setback

Saddle: Selle Italia Flite Boost TM

Weight: ~9.9kg (unloaded)

Price: Wilier offers ready-to-ride Adlar builds starting at $7,200 AUD.

BELOW: The frame is built with touring resilience, mountain bike DNA, and gravel-bike responsiveness.

BOTTOM: The Campagnolo EKAR hydraulic brakes performed well on loose gravel.

said, the 44T chainring felt overgeared for steep gravel pinches, especially under partial load. On sealed roads it was fine, but on sharp, low-speed climbs over rocky shale, I would have benefited from a 40T or 42T.

CAMPAGNOLO LEVANTE WHEELS & VITTORIA TERRENO DRY TYRES

The Levante wheelset strikes the right balance between durability and finesse. It took rough hits without fuss, and the Terreno Dry tyres—despite the name—gripped well across dust, dry rock, and wet patches. Their volume and tread let me ride confidently across surfaces many riders would approach with caution.

DEDA ELEMENTI GERA CARBON BAR & LOOP TAPE

Flared drops offer leverage and descending control, but it's the overall comfort geometry that made a difference here. Easy to grip and simple to reach the drops. Hats off to how the shifters are positioned - serious comfort that I hadn't experienced, and the proof was in the lack of usual neck strain I've come to expect after long gravel routes. After hours in the saddle, the combination of bar shape and bar tape's plush feel kept wrist/hand fatigue at bay.

ERGON ALLROAD PRO CARBON SEATPOST & SELLE ITALIA FLITE BOOST SADDLE

If you have suffered from pain associated with typical jarring over gravel, you will want to try this seat post with superior compliance. The Ergon seatpost muted trail chatter in a subtle, effective way, never feeling squishy. It gave the saddle room to do its job. No unnecessary loss of power that comes with a dropper post. No shuffling and repositioning in the saddle required. Just continued support.

Loaded and capable: touring potential

Were there still moments I could use the comfort and capability of an MTB? Sure, but the Adlar remained light enough to dismount and carry should the risks outweigh the rewards. This helps make the Adlar more than a weekend wanderer. With modular mounting options, mudguard compatibility, and the ability to run bags, it's clearly ready for expedition use. Riders like Wiebke Lühmann and Veronica Santandrea have proven that – using the Adlar across mountains and continents with up to 35kg of cargo. And while my ride didn't involve border crossings, it did demand self-sufficiency, reliability, and resilience.

Engineered for trust

The Wilier Adlar isn't built to impress with flash. It builds its reputation the longer you ride it. Stability, comfort, and responsiveness – especially under weight – define this frame. The ride becomes smoother, your confidence grows, and the terrain begins to feel less intimidating. That's not by chance – it's the result of deliberate engineering and thoughtful component pairing.

No bike is perfect. And this one would benefit from a tighter gear ratio for proper adventure climbing. But when it comes to ride feel, balance, and the joy of just riding, the Adlar delivers something special. BA

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Wahoo TRACKR RADAR

The TRACKR RADAR is an integrated rear light and vehicle detection system. It marks Wahoo's belated foray into the bike radar market where it will go head to head with established players like Garmin, Bryton and Magene, amongst others.

WORDS: PETER MANIATY

Detecting rear traffic from up to 150 metres away, day or night, the Wahoo TRACKR RADAR is all about safety, especially when riding solo. It sends out a steady radar signal as you ride and then receives the bounced-back signal from approaching objects such as cars, trucks, buses, motorbikes and, of course, other cyclists. This data is then sent to your head unit, which provides visual and/or audible alerts. It also features a dual LED tail light with four settings and a maximum output of 53 lumens. Curved edges help to enhance side-on visibility (a known issue with some radars) whilst an in-built accelerometer can be used to increase the luminosity and flash rate whenever you decelerate. There's also a 'Quick Alert' option that changes to a continuous flash pattern to draw maximum attention whenever a vehicle enters the detection zone. On the flip side, you can activate the 'Battery Extender' to decrease luminosity when no cars are behind you. The unit weighs just 63 grams.

Setting up

The TRACKR RADAR syncs effortlessly with most bike computers, Wahoo or otherwise. During the review I was mostly running my trusty Garmin 530 and had zero connectivity issues. The main settings can be adjusted directly from your head unit, whilst you can also use the Wahoo app to check battery levels, set the Brake Light and Quick Alert functions, and toggle the Battery Extender on and off. Alas, there's no real-time companion app for smartphones, at least for now.

ABOVE: The curved edges of the Wahoo TRACKR RADAR help to enhance side-on visibility.

Mounting

The box includes two quick-connect rubber straps, a quarter-turn Wahoo mount and adapters for aero/round, D-shaped and flat seat posts. Importantly, the TRACKR RADAR isn't compatible with official Garmin mounts as the rear tabs are fractionally too big. This won't be an issue if you're able to use one of the mounting options provided or you're looking to purchase non-standard mounts, say for saddle bags or seat rails. However, if you already own these accessories and they're made to exact Garmin specs you may need to use adapters.

Battery life

Claimed run times are pretty impressive. Wahoo says you'll get up to 20 hours per charge on 'low flash' (18 lumens), 15 hours on 'high flash' (53 lumens) and 10 hours on 'high steady'

(21 lumens). Out in the real-world I was consistently getting a very respectable 8-9 hours on 'high steady'. Charging is straightforward via the universal USB-C standard.

On the road

Simple and intuitive, within just a few kilometres I was very comfortable with the TRACKR RADAR system and genuinely felt a little safer; not just knowing when a vehicle was behind me, but also how quickly it was approaching. Having this information allowed me to make better decisions without having to constantly take my eyes off the road ahead.

Vehicle tracking was precise and essentially instant. Whenever something approached, a short audio alert sounded and a pair of orange bars (red when vehicles were moving at higher speed) appeared on my head unit with simple dots indicating its position. Once the threat had passed, the coloured bars briefly switched to green before disappearing.

I experienced very few false positives, and the ones I did were largely the result of cars turning into side streets or when I was on a bike path directly alongside a road. The audio alerts were especially handy when my mind wandered on solo rides; a quick beep to get my attention.

Wahoo says alerts activate when vehicles approach from up to 150 metres behind, however, my experience was even better with clear lines of sight. With a 35-degree field of vision, the detection zone isn't the widest on the market – but it was still good enough to detect vehicles approaching from directly behind me and also those in adjoining lanes on multi-lane roads. Pleasingly, it didn't continually pester me with new audio alerts when riding in smaller groups. However, like most radars, it did get a little muddled in larger bunches where it became less useful (but also less necessary, of course).

Summing up

The Wahoo TRACKR RADAR is a serious new player in the rear light radar market with easy set-up, accurate performance, excellent battery life and the convenience of USB-C charging. It isn't the cheapest option at $350 (RRP), but for me it's not dissimilar to investing in a good quality helmet. Do you really want to cut corners when it comes to safety? BA

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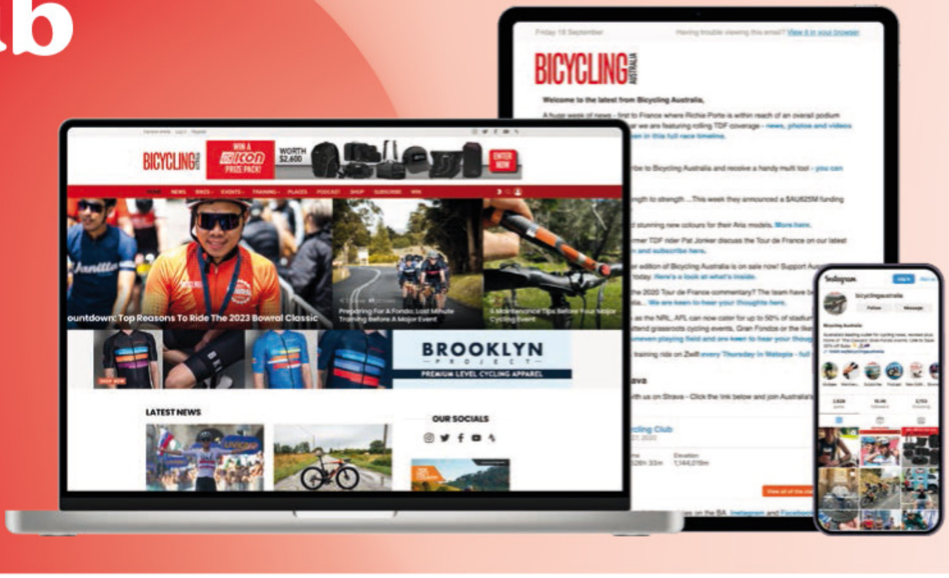

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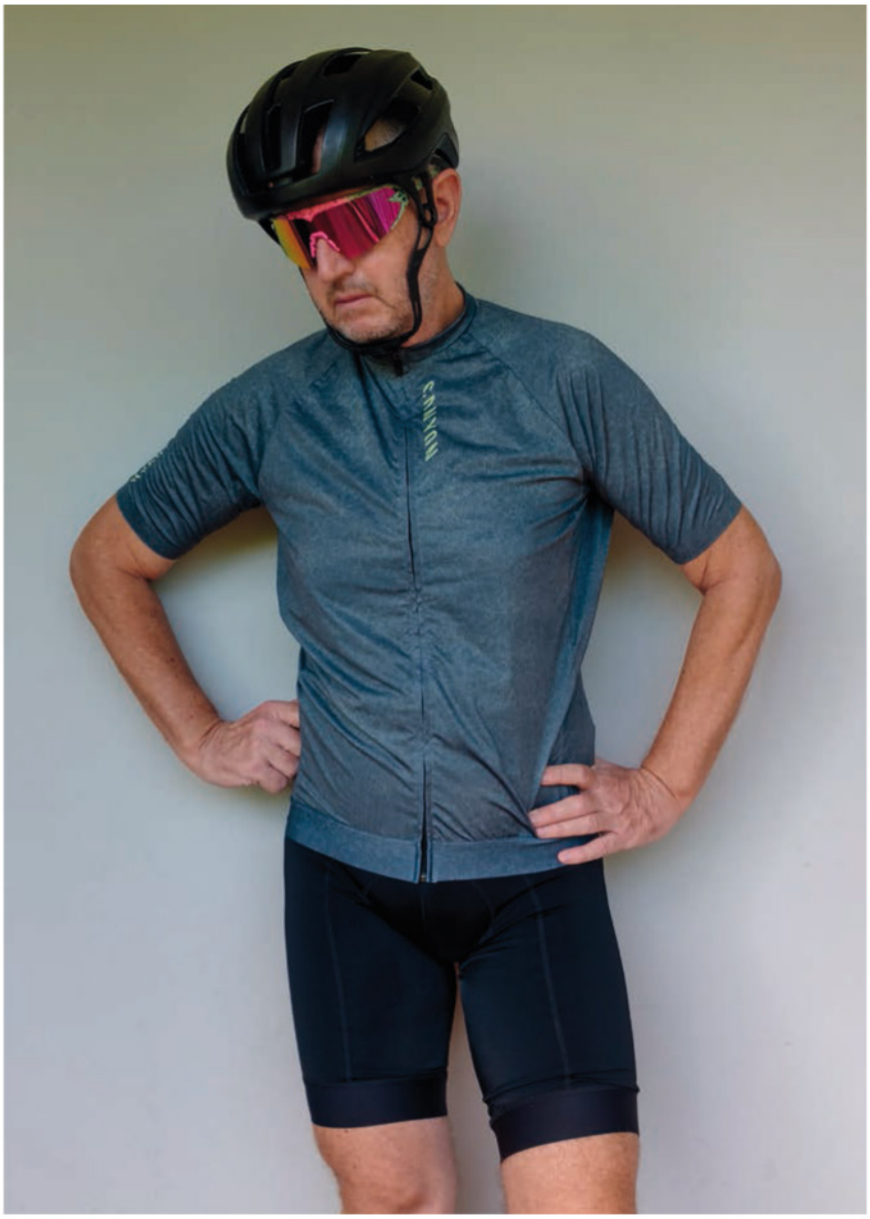
ENEWSLETTER

Canyon Core Bibshorts & Short Sleeve Jersey

Canyon has just released its new Core Bibshorts and jersey. We got an early airing of this summery combo – read on to see how they stacked up.

WORDS: STEVE THOMAS



Like many major bike brands, Canyon has produced its own branded clothing ranges for some time now – solid, no-nonsense, good-value, and quality kit, or so I've found from testing some of the ranges over the past year.

Pleasingly, Canyon has adopted an in-house design approach and partnered with leading European manufacturers for its clothing lines.

The new Core pairing I've been strutting for the last week is pitched as a regular-fitting, comfortable, non-constrictive range designed for long and warm rides. It comes in various sizes, colours, and male and female models.

Bibshorts

These knicks come only in black, have reflective but subtle silver-grey Canyon logos on one upper-rear leg and upper back (out of sight), plus 2 small reflective seam tabs.

Made mostly from polyester, they have pleasingly deep silicone leg grippers, rather nice wide and sturdy Softgrip straps, and a vented mesh back panel—no unnecessary frills.

The undercarriage features what they call a D30 Chamois & Aeromax insert, which is designed for extra padding and comfort and is different on the men's and women's versions.

These are no-frills, solid, and quality knicks that do exactly what they claim. They're designed for comfort, and the fit is generous. As for the pad, the two under-groin pads are pretty deep and pronounced, which should make them well suited for longer road and gravel rides.

Personally, I prefer a lower profile pad but that's a personal thing.

Short-sleeved jersey

This is a full zipp and good-looking jersey. It is practical and made for long balmy days out. It has three rear pockets, plus a large zipped rear inner pocket and a key hook, and is available in various colours.

The jersey is a practical and high-quality all-rounder made from well-breathable polyester. In addition to silicon-lined sleeve bands, there's a nice and deep silicon-beaded waistband. The pockets also feature a reinforced entry band, which adds to durability.

There is a reflective logo on one rear pocket and one sleeve – although on the yellow print version, it doesn't appear to be as reflective as on the white jersey that I also tested. Although the coloured version is the same material as the white jersey, the colouring/coating does give it a silkier feel.

In use, the jersey is comfortably spacious, pretty breathable, and solid in build. It is just the ticket for warm and long rides where a hugging fit is not what you may want, which will be especially welcomed by those who may have felt a little confronted by the race fit trend that gets a bit old.

Overall, these are both well-made, properly engineered, and good value pieces of kit.

Sizing notes

Traditionally, many manufacturers seem to produce tight-fit kit, which doesn't suit many regular riders. Having been a little squeezed into race-fit clothing of late, I opted to go up a size with the Core. Ironically, as now stated on the Canyon website, these are a more regular fit, meaning that there was no need to do that. BA

Core Bibshorts AU$ 169.95
Core S/S Jersey AU$139.95
More info www.canyon.com

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The Classics

Kask Protone Icon

The popular Protone Icon from Kask has been given an update with four new colours. Editor Nicola Rutzou put it through its paces.

WORDS: NICOLA RUTZOU

The Kask Protone Icon is not a new model, but Kask has recently added four new matt colours to the range, including Sahara, which I tested. I must admit I was a bit sceptical about the colour, but it's grown on me. Despite my misgivings, it is a colour that matches most of my cycling gear and is easy to see from a distance.

I found the Kask OCTOFIT+ adjustment system to be particularly comfortable and supportive. Thanks to the neck stabiliser, the retention system hugged the back of my head without feeling tight, allowing me to adjust the position up or down depending on my head shape. This provides a great sense of security and gives you the feeling that it's cradling your head, rather than sitting on top of it. The plastic dial features a rubber coating, making it easy to grip, even with gloves on, for tightening or loosening as required.

Thankfully, I didn't get to test out the Protone Icon's safety features, but Kask tells me that it has passed the Kask Rotational Impact WG11 Test, an internal, scientific testing procedure adopted by the company that measures the helmet's performance when subjected to rotational impacts.

The Protone Icon features 14 vents: eight in the front and six in the rear, which make it comfortable in warm weather but potentially a little cool in cold weather; however, this can be mitigated with a head covering. However, I wonder whether it would provide enough sun protection for people with little hair on their heads.

The faux leather chinstrap has a substantial feel, and once it's clicked in, it feels quite immovable and secure. At first, it felt very stiff to the touch, but over time, it softened to make it more comfortable.

The internal lining is comfortable and absorbs sweat well. Kask says it is made of CoolMax fabric, which is comfortable and quick-drying and removable and washable.

A reflective insert on the rear has been included to increase road safety.

I tested the size small, which fits a range of head sizes from 50 to 56cm and weighs 290 grams, making it light and comfortable on my head. It also comes in medium and large, so the model covers a range of head circumferences from 50 to 62cm.

The other new colours are Lavender, Tangerine, and Forest Green. They join the eight existing offerings, bringing the total number of choices to 12. The Protone Icon has a retail price of $430.

More info kask.com/en-au

Key Highlights

- Lightweight and well ventilated
- Comfortable and secure retention system
- Great colour range
- Sturdy chin strap
- Washable internal lining.

PROTONE ICON

Trek Velocis shoes

The Trek Velocis Road mid-range shoes are comfortable, functional, and look good too.

WORDS: NICOLA RUTZOU

I was a little concerned about the bright white uppers, which look like they'd be scuffed in no time, but after many wears, they still look brand new (with a few marks wiped off from time to time).

I was curious to know why they were not Bontrager-branded, as Trek has previously used that brand for accessories. I was told that the Trek global team decided to move all 'body accessories' under the Trek brand. Bontrager will still be the brand for wheels, tyres, and other parts.

Now we've got that cleared up, I'll share my experience of the shoes.

The Velocis' carbon soles offer enough stiffness for my liking without ever being overly harsh, and the uppers are comfortable with just the right level of padding. Just for reference, my usual shoes are a high-end pair from a rival brand with a high stiffness rating, and they felt no different to me. Perhaps if I were a different type of rider, this might be more apparent, but for a typical recreational rider, they are just right.

The soles have a carbon appearance, but I'm told they are a composite of carbon and fibreglass, the latter being 30 per cent. Trek says the shoes offer excellent power transfer. Another advantage is the replaceable heel pad, which will inevitably wear down over time.

The uppers are made from a mixture of TPU (Thermoplastic Polyurethane) and nylon, with lots of small ventilation perforations. This is great for summer riding, where feet stay well-ventilated and cool, but not so good in winter. I know I'll be covering these beauties in shoe covers as soon as the temperatures drop.

The perforations on the side are the shape of three-point stars, making them look nice, and Trek says it makes the upper more flexible. This METNET technology reduces the chances of pressure points, hotspots and foot discomfort. I found them comfortable during testing and didn't experience any food pain or discomfort.

The shoes also feature a foam tongue designed to effectively distribute pressure across the top of the foot, which can be a common area for pain. Once again, I found them comfortable from the first wear.

The Velocis shoes' closures are twin Boa dials, which made tightening and releasing them super easy. To tighten, push the dials until they click and rotate to your comfort level. To loosen, the Boa dials click up and fully release. I found them very intuitive and easy to operate from the first wear.

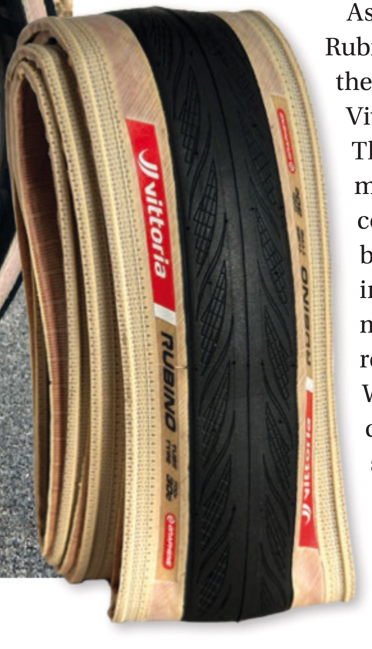
My one criticism is the lack of arch support, although this could be easily fixed with aftermarket arch supports from Trek or another brand. BA

Trek Velocis Road Shoes are available at Trek retailers and online at trekbikes.com for $449.99.

Vittoria Rubino tyres

Rubino has been a mainstay of the Vittoria road tyre range for nearly two decades. The fifth generation Rubino hit the market back in May, superseding the popular Rubino Pro IV.

WORDS: PETER MANIATY



Designed to provide an all-round balance of grip, durability and speed, Vittoria markets the new Rubino as its 'Advanced Training' tyre, suitable for a wide range of road and weather conditions. It sits one notch below the Corsa N.EXT range which arrived in 2023, and a quick look at the spec sheet suggests some of that N.EXT technology has trickled down.

As you'd expect from a training tyre, the new Rubino is a little heavier than Vittoria's race-specific models. I weighed the review tyres (30mm, tube-type, para/tan sidewalls) at 253 grams; that's around 50 grams more than the equivalent in the Corsa N.EXT range. Curiously, the black sidewall tyres are 15-30 grams heavier suggesting the composition is ever-so-slightly different. Tyre widths range from 26mm to 34mm. Tubeless-ready and tube-type options are available.

Based on lab and real-world testing, Vittoria claims the new Rubino offers equivalent puncture protection to the Rubino Pro IV whilst being superior in every other performance category. Specifically, it says the new Rubino delivers 6 per cent better wet weather grip, 2 per cent better rolling resistance and is also 12 per cent lighter. The two main reasons are the upgraded graphene/silica-infused compound and a modernised tread pattern.

As mentioned, the new Rubino borrows some of the tech first introduced in Vittoria's Corsa N.EXT range. The most significant is the move to a new hybrid tread compound engineered with both graphene and silica in the pursuit of longer mileage, added puncture resistance and better grip. Whereas the Corsa N.EXT compound can be a little soft and tacky, I found the Rubino compound noticeably firmer to touch, something that suggests,

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Specifications

Vittoria Rubino V

RRP: $84.99 (tube-type), $109.99 (tubeless-ready)

Colours: Black, Para/Tan

Sizes: 26mm, 28mm, 30mm, 32mm, 34mm (hookless compatible 28mm+)

TC) – 5.0 BAR / 72 PSI / 500 KPA (HOOKLESS SS / TSS) TWI

ittoria
RUBINO
TUBE TYPE

ABOVE: The Rubino V tyres feature a new hybrid tread compound engineered with both graphene and silica in the pursuit of longer mileage, added puncture resistance and better grip.

it's likely to offer better longevity. Beneath the new compound lies a hard-wearing 100 TPI nylon casing (reduced from 150 TPI on the Rubino Pro IV) along with a high density anti-puncture belt. There's also a bead shield reinforcing guard, whilst the flexibility of the Kevlar bead itself in the tube-type models assists with mounting and inflation. The TLR model uses a non-stretch Zylon bead similar to the Corsa N.EXT. Vittoria says the new Rubino is suitable for both hooked and hookless rims.

The new Rubino tyres were a breeze to mount – I tested them on two very different sets of rims just to be sure – slotting straight into place with very little encouragement required. As always, I started at the upper end of the recommended pressure scale, around 85psi for the 30mm tube-type review tyres, then began to work my way down. Running at higher pressures unquestionably delivered a more direct and responsive road feel. But if it's comfort you're after, low is definitely the way to go – they'll feel like completely different tyres. Obviously rider weight and tyre size come into the equation, but by the time I got down towards the 65-60psi mark, the ride quality was smooth and wonderfully stable, perfect for longer days and more endurance style riding, especially on less-than-smooth surfaces. In terms of the all-important grip, one of the main claimed improvements from previous Rubino models, I found it to be well above average both in the dry and wet; but once again the real sweet spot seemed to be in the lower pressure ranges.

When it comes to assessing long-term durability, it's impossible to be definitive after just a one-month review. What I can say is I quite intentionally trashed these tyres at every opportunity and didn't have any issues. Rough bitumen. Light gravel. Mud. Kerb jumping. Potholes, manholes, drain covers. Sticks and branches. If there was rubble in the bike lane, I made sure to ride straight over it. The result? No punctures and very few visible cuts. Sure, it's a small sample size conducted on brand new tyres, but I got every impression a pair of new Rubinos should deliver long and hassle-free use.

Summing Up

Building upon its proven 'all-rounder' reputation, the fifth-generation Rubino is a worthy evolution of the name. Reassuringly smooth and stable, particularly at lower pressures, and pleasingly grippy, they're a rock-solid choice for everyday riding. BA

More info gkasports.com.au

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Image: Destination NSW

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Should I take my bike on holiday?

Is there any holiday where you wouldn't benefit from enjoying your favourite pastime of cycling, ponders **Lee Turner**.

Let's cut to the chase: if you're even asking this question, the answer is probably yes.

But I get it. You're staring at your half-packed bag, eyeing your bike box like it's a ticking time bomb. Your partner's already asked, "Do you really need to bring it?". Some airlines want your firstborn child just to check it in. And your back's already hurting from lugging it to the airport curb.

So… should you take your bike on holiday?

Hell yes, you should. Every single time.

The hassle is real, but temporary

Let's not pretend it's all smooth tarmac. Taking your bike on holiday can be a logistical nightmare. Packing it without snapping something. Praying the baggage handlers don't play WrestleMania with it. Navigating hire cars, transfers, narrow staircases, and tiny hotel lifts. Then there's the transport. Will it fit in the rental car? Can it come on the train? Is it going to get stolen if you leave it locked up for five minutes outside a bakery in Barcelona? (Don't lock it up; always make sure it's in sight.) You'll hoist it upstairs, roll it over cobbles, wedge it into elevators, and navigate unfamiliar terrain, always with one eye on your precious two-wheeled companion.

It's awkward. It's annoying. It's an effort. But like every long climb, the suffering is short-term. The payoff? That lasts forever.

The payoff is limitless

The moment you swing your leg over that familiar saddle in an unfamiliar place, everything changes. You're not just a tourist anymore. You're a rider. A local – if only for a day.

Your bike becomes your compass. Your freedom machine. That awkward, oversized, gear-guzzling piece of luggage you cursed at the airport suddenly becomes your passport to adventure.

You discover roads no rental car will ever find. Roads that aren't on the map. The perfect bakery halfway up a hill. The lookout with a view that steals your breath. The descent that puts tears in your eyes – not from fear, but pure, dumb joy.

Ride the story, not the itinerary

Holiday itineraries are fine. But riding? That's where the stories live.

You'll remember your ride at sunrise while the town was still asleep. You'll remember the winding climb through olive groves or forest switchbacks that led to a hilltop café with pastries that never tasted so good. You'll remember chasing local riders, legs screaming, lungs burning, heart full.

No tour bus gives you that.

And when you roll back to your accommodation, sun-kissed and sweat-streaked, with a grin you can't wipe off. That's when you know – it was worth it.

> “YOU DISCOVER ROADS NO RENTAL CAR WILL FIND. ROADS THAT AREN'T ON A MAP.”

The people make the ride

There's a magic in turning up to a bunch ride in a city you've never been to, only to be welcomed like family. Cycling is a global language. It says: I get it. I'm one of you.

Local riders will show you their favourite loops, hidden gems, and probably drop you on a climb just to keep your ego in check. And later, they'll buy you a sparkling water and chat like you've known each other for years. You didn't just ride; you plugged into a global tribe.

That's the beauty of taking your bike – it brings people to you. Good people. Mad people. The best kind of people.

FANCELLO CICLI
SCUOLA NAZIONALE MTB
SCOTT
CADEX
MICHE
78

LEFY: Lee Turner visits the local bike shop, Fancello Cicli in Olbia, Italy.

MAIN: The Evoc Bike Bag Pro is an ideal way to transport your road bike.

Fitness, freedom, and French pastries

And let's not forget the holiday paradox: we want to relax, but we don't want to come home five kilos heavier and feeling sluggish. Bringing your bike is the ultimate cheat code. Ride in the morning, indulge in the afternoon. Smash a mountain pass, then smash a croissant. Roll long, then roll into happy hour.

You'll return fitter than you left, with better tan lines, stronger legs, and a heart full of memories that no resort pool can compete with.

No regrets, only chainrings

Let's be honest, no one ever says, “I wish I didn't bring my bike.”

But plenty of riders have stood on a spectacular road, staring at the horizon, thinking, “Damn – I wish I had my bike right now.”

Don't be that person. Take the bike. Take the adventure. Take the long way around. Your future self will thank you every time you clip in.

Final word: take the bike always

Sure, it can be a pain. Yes, it's awkward. But the reward? Unbeatable.

The roads, the views, the people, the rides. That feeling of freedom when the tyres hum, the chain sings, and the world opens up in front of your bars – that's not something you can hire or borrow. That's yours. And you brought it with you.

So next time you're packing for a holiday, and you're weighing up a beach towel versus a bike bag, remember this:

Take the bike. Make the memories. Ride the holiday you'll never forget. Remember, a bike isn't just a machine. It's a passport to the places guidebooks don't reach, and the best way to see the world is from the saddle.

Spin Cycle: Absolutely Ludicrous

Even by his own lofty standards, the world's best cyclist realised his best ever spring campaign. Just don't tell him it came easy, writes **Anthony Tan**.

A day before the start of Liège-Bastogne-Liège, cycling's oldest monument, Tadej Pogačar, as the defending champion, was obliged to give interviews to the awaiting broadcast media.

He was still smiling – well, sort of, anyway – but the usual sparkle was missing from his eyes. He had a cold sore on his lips, a dead giveaway his body is physically weakened. (Even in the Tours de France he won but especially those he lost, he seems to get them in the second and third weeks.)

For the host broadcaster, interviewer Fran Reyes, a Spanish journalist contracted by ASO, organiser of the race as well as *Le Tour* itself, did his best to ask the usual questions.

What did you do between your win at La Flèche Wallonne and Liège-Bastogne-Liège? How do you think the race will play out? Who will be your main rivals?

Pogačar couldn't seem to care any less.

At that point – Saturday April 26, to be precise – he had already raced 2,504 kilometres in 13 race days. Due to injuries, his two closest rivals for this year's Tour, Jonas Vingegaard and Remco Evenepoel, had 1,483km (over 10 race days) and 623km (over 3 race days) in their legs at the same point in time, respectively.

For The Pog, every race had been a WorldTour event. In every event bar one, he was expected to win. Every event, he expected himself to win.

Realising he was flogging a dead horse with such bland questions, the interviewer tried his luck with this last one: "We are taking bets on which kilometre the race will split up at..."

Pogačar shrugged his shoulders before answering, "I dunno. I cannot bet."

Awkward silence.

Interviewer: "Thank you very much and good luck."

When your biggest rival is yourself...

When you have just three days between races, you do the three Rs: rest, recover and recon. When your name is Tadej Pogačar and you have a team like UAE Team Emirates-XRG, nine times out of ten, the race plays out how you want it to play out.

And when your name is Tadej Pogačar and you are the best rider of your generation, nine times out of ten, your main rival is nobody but yourself.

The current road world champion may have been fatigued and had no time for pre-race chit-chat, but following a runner-up place at Amstel Gold in The Netherlands, he clearly had enough in the tank to bounce back at La Flèche Wallonne the following Wednesday.

By most pundits' observations, only one rider was deemed worthy of being named a credible rival.

Yet last December, Belgian Evenepoel slammed into a door of a postal van and suffered fractures to his rib, right shoulder blade and hand. His first race back was just nine days before Liège-Bastogne-Liège, though because of his win there and his third place at Amstel Gold, Remco was considered a contender.

Turns out, he wasn't.

Evenepoel, world champion in Wollongong in 2022, wasn't even in the right position before the base of La Redoute, with 36 kilometres remaining the hardest point of L-B-L. Not seeing his main rival only spurred on the Slovenian, he said afterwards, launching a powerful seated attack on La Redoute that was akin to pressing the 'Ludicrous+' switch on a souped-up Tesla.

Just like us at home, what remained of the front group sat dumbfounded and watched.

Ten seconds at the top of the 1.6km climb averaging 8.8% turned into a 1'03 winning margin over Italian Giulio Ciccone of Lidl-Trek; his Danish team-mate Mattias Skjelmose was the only rider to get the better of The Pog in the Ardennes races, at Amstel Gold.

"I only picked the best races to win"

And so, out of his first eight races, the Slovenian's results sheet read thus: first (UAE Tour), first (Strade Bianche), third (Milano-Sanremo), first (Tour of Flanders), second (Paris-Roubaix), second (Amstel Gold), first (Flèche Wallonne), and first (Liège-Bastogne-Liège).

"I think this spring (campaign) was amazing... I only picked the best races in the world for this part of the season," he said after his victory at Liège.

"The expectations were high... The energy was just 'hanging in there' for the [Ardennes] races each week. The final (three) races in the Ardennes, I think every race was a little bit better (suited) for me."

IT'S JUST POGI'S WORLD
and LUCKILY we're LIVING IN IT!!

ABOVE: Fans cheer on 'Pogi' at the 2024 Tour de France. Photo credit: A.S.O. Billy Ceusters

LEFT: Pogačar with one of his many yellow jerseys in the 2024 Tour de France. Photo credit: A.S.O. Billy Ceusters

BELOW: Remco Evenepoel (left) and Pogačar on the start line of the 2025 La Flèche Wallonne. Photo credit: Sirotti

“Was Liège as easy as it looked?”, asked a journalist in the press scrum.

Pogačar was affronted. He gave back his version of ‘The look’.

“Never say it’s easy in cycling. Never.”

Sanremo and Roubaix were always going to be the two races that suited him least. In the former, he and his team have tried a number of ways to win but had to settle for third for the second time running, this year at the hands of now two-time winner Mathieu van der Poel.

As for Roubaix the 26-year-old had never ridden The Hell of the North before – yet it didn’t stop him thinking he could win it.

Somehow, he adapted his 66 kilo frame to master the *pavé*; his only error in the 259.2km classic was to overshoot a right-hand corner 38km from the finish at the Vélodrome André-Pétrieux, when he was away with eventual winner van der Poel.

One would now suggest he has a greater chance of winning Roubaix than Sanremo. No one in their right mind would’ve thought such a thing before April 13 this year.

Catching up to The Cannibal…

I will not go into stats because the results alone speak for themselves. Quite simply, there is no other rider like him.

Well, not today.

In the '70s there was this guy called Eddy Merckx, who was so dominant and had such a voracious appetite for success they nicknamed him ‘The Cannibal’. 525 victories across an 18 year career that comprised 11 Grand Tours including five Tours de France and five Giri d’Italia – and winning all five Monuments at least twice was thought to be a feat that would never be equalled.

> “QUITE SIMPLY, THERE IS NO OTHER RIDER LIKE HIM.. WELL, NOT TODAY.”

But Pogačar, if he continues on his current trajectory, may get close. He may even surpass some of Merckx’s achievements – though it must be said after his victory in Liège he is still a massive 430 wins behind the Belgian living legend.

Professional cycling is rarely a popularity contest – *the aim, after all, is to win!* – but it would seem Tadej is, on the whole, a much more likeable figure than Merckx in his heyday.

On the occasions he doesn’t win, Pogačar appears to be a gracious loser. He seems genuinely happy when a team-mate wins, and, most times, does not attribute blame to his team-mates or sports directors when things go awry – at least not publicly.

Unlike Merckx, The Pog doesn’t seem to make enemies. If he does, they prefer to stay silent.

Of course, there will always be fans who like one rider more than another, or dislike someone simply because of their success. In Australia and New Zealand we call it ‘Tall Poppy Syndrome’; it doesn’t seem to exist in Slovenia, though many would’ve liked to see Primož Roglič win the Tour in 2020, such was the cruelty of his loss.

After his victory at Flèche Wallonne, when a rival jokingly asked him when will he retire, Pogačar responded: “I have a contract till 2030.”

By then he’ll only be 32. Like him or not, he may be around for 10 more years.

My advice? Enjoy *Le Tour*, enjoy the spectacle, and enjoy Le Pog in his pomp. BA

LEFT: Pogačar wins the 2025 Liège-Bastogne-Liège in the World Championship kit.

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